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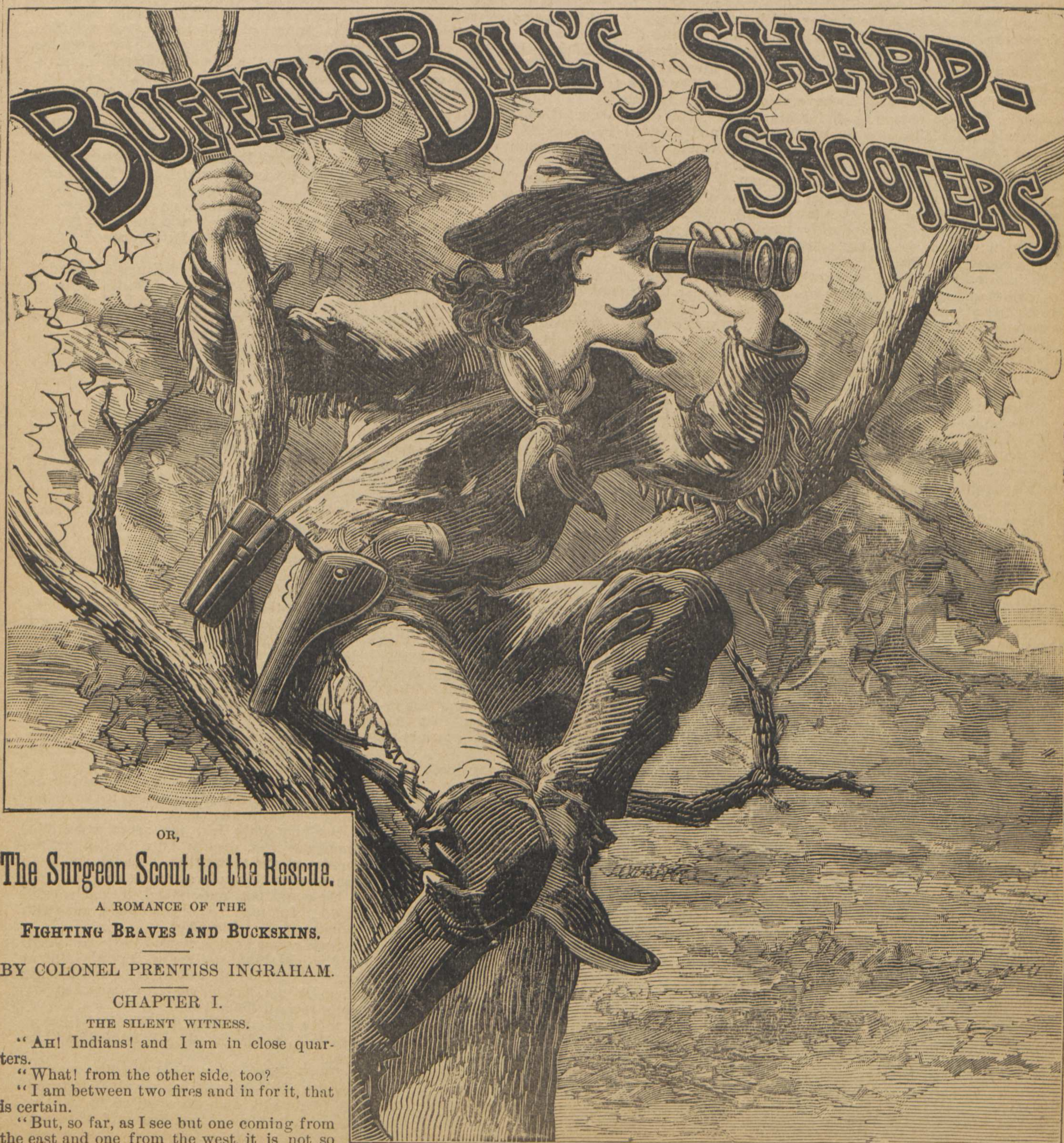
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OR, The Surgeon Scout to the Rescue.

A ROMANCE OF THE
FIGHTING BRAVES AND BUCKSKINS.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE SILENT WITNESS.

"Ah! Indians! and I am in close quarters.

"What! from the other side, too?

"I am between two fires and in for it, that is certain.

"But, so far, as I see but one coming from the east and one from the west, it is not so bad, after all."

The speaker was a man who, to say that it

BUFFALO BILL, PERCHED UP IN A TREE-TOP, LOOKED BACK OVER THE TRAIL
THROUGH HIS FIELD-GLASS.

was Buffalo Bill, introduces him at once to my auditor, for William F. Cody has made for himself fame that is world wide, and his title, won as a scout, Indian-fighter and guide, is known in every part of the country of which he is such an honored and magnificent type of the representative American.

It was away back in the days of frequent Indian wars, when the red-men were fighting back the advance of civilization, and our brave army was struggling to protect the frontier from their ravages, a time that tried men's souls, and made heroes in the fort and on the trail.

Chief of scouts at Fort Ready, Buffalo Bill was wont to go out from the post upon long and lone scouting expeditions into the Indian country to see just what the red-skins were about, and thus give timely notice of an intended dash upon fort or settlement, or to watch and report the changes of Indian villages, so as to keep them under surveillance.

He was returning from such an expedition alone and with his horse well worn, when he halted early to camp, finding a piece of timber like an island in the sea, for it was surrounded on all sides with prairie, and only in the distance on the westward being visible a range of hills.

There was a spring in the timber, thickets of underbrush, some large trees and groups of rocks scattered here and there—the very spot for a camp, or a place in which to stand at bay against a foe.

The tired scout was glad to have reached so good a bivouac ground, glad for his own sake, and for his faithful horse, who so much needed rest.

He had staked his horse out in a bit of meadow land, had spread his blankets, gotten out his haversack of provisions, and was collecting wood for his fire when he suddenly spied the form of a horse and rider looming up over a prairie rise to the eastward, and fully a couple of miles away.

He naturally supposed that others were following, and taking a glance around the horizon, to his surprise he saw in the westward another horse and rider.

Again he supposed that others followed this one also.

He watched them attentively, glancing from one to the other and then said aloud:

"They are alone, that is certain, and that means that it is a meeting at this point, for each has seen the other by this time, and shows no surprise.

"Yes, and they are big chiefs, too, by their head-dresses, and my glass will soon show me their tribes."

He leveled his field-glass, which was swung to his belt in a case, first at one then at the other, and mused aloud:

"That one to the westward is a full-fledged chief, to be toggled out as he is in all that finery and feathers, and he is a Sioux.

"The other is a Pawnee, and also a big chief, high up in his tribe, as his war-bonnet shows.

"Their horses are also decked out in full regalia, and their coming here to meet each other alone either means a secret council to bury the hatchet between their tribes and unite against the pale faces, or to meet each other in a duel and settle some private affair between them.

"No, they are in full war-paint and that decides it; they have come here to fight.

"Now for me to lie low and see the duel!

"Yes, I'll be a silent witness and chip in only if I see a chance to make a deal to favor the pale-faces."

With this Buffalo Bill crept away from his point of observation to a group of rocks, where he could lie hidden and see what took place.

Of course if the red-skins, whatever their motive in coming there, discovered his presence, then he must take the chances of a fight with them.

But, this did not seem to trouble him in the least, as he calmly awaited their approach.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUEL OF THE RED GLADIATORS.

THE two chiefs came slowly toward the timber, each one in sight of the other now,

for their trails were to the northward of the motte, and bore obliquely toward it.

They were half a mile from the meeting-point when the scout went into his place of ambush, and a mile from each other.

"They are promptly on time," muttered Buffalo Bill.

"I wonder how they would like me for a second or for umpire?"

"They would drop their quarrel and make war against me, I guess, so I must lie low, for awhile, at least."

Nearer and nearer the two Indians came, and their eyes were fixed upon each other as they approached.

Just as Buffalo Bill, who knew the Indian character perfectly, had suspected they would, they did not ride into the timber, but halted within a hundred yards of each other, and each dismounted and staked out his pony.

Then they hung their rifles and bows and arrows upon their saddles, and throwing off their extra paraphernalia, began to slowly walk toward each other.

It was half an hour before sunset now, and the prairie was as quiet as a country churchyard.

The ponies did not crop grass, but stood regarding their masters as though conscious that something of moment was on hand.

In the deep recesses of the timber not a leaf stirred, and neither chief suspected that therein lurked a foe who was the deadliest enemy their tribes had when they were on the war-path.

Had they suspected then that the famous and dreaded Pa-e-has-ka* was so near, they would gladly have made common cause against him.

But it would have been the death-knell of either, or both, to have then advanced upon him, for his trusty Winchester was at his side, and they would have found him ready for the fray whenever they wished to begin it.

As the two chiefs advanced upon each other to engage in the duel, their ponies staked out behind them, their long war-bonnets of eagle-feathers falling almost to their feet, their right hands clasping their long, glittering knives, while their left arms were protected by a rude rawhide shield, and Buffalo Bill crouching in the timber watching them, it made up a picture that was most stirring and impressive.

Nearer and nearer they drew, each wary, cunning, determined and fearless—each thirsting for the life and scalplock of the other.

Buffalo Bill now recognized them both—"Knife Killer," the great young Pawnee chief, noted for his daring rushes upon his foes and taking their lives with his knife alone; and "Death Dealer," the young Sioux chief who was also famed for his encounters with his trusty blade, in hand-to-hand engagements.

For some reason these two knights of the knife had met to settle their difficulty with a duel to the death, alone and with knives.

What their motive was Buffalo Bill could not guess, but he was there, a silent witness of the encounter, and he felt the impressiveness of his situation and rejoiced that they had not brought their picked warriors as seconds.

No, it was to be a duel to the death there between them!

They could have used their rifles, their bows, or rushed upon each other mounted and settled the affair.

But no, it was to be a knife fight afoot, each disdaining to take advantage of the other.

Like gladiators they advanced, ready to leap upon each other when near enough, and when either one saw an opening for a deadly blow.

Suddenly the Pawnee chief, Knife Killer, gave the wild war-cry of his tribe and made a bound toward the Sioux.

Instantly the cry was defiantly answered by Death Dealer, and the two were upon each other.

Two savage lunges were made and the rawhide shields caught the blades, buried to the hilt in them.

With a twist they were whipped out, and

* Buffalo Bill's Indian name, meaning "Long Hair."

again descended, and each this time found flesh to sheathe them in, for the Pawnee's blade sunk into the arm of the Sioux, the latter's into the thigh of his foe.

Then thick and fast rained the blows, oftener striking the shields thrust between to guard the bodies, but now and then cutting into flesh and grating on bone until the ground reddened beneath the feet of these deadly red duelists.

Suddenly, the Pawnee slipped, tried to recover himself, but fell, and with a wild cry his foe, though badly wounded, sprung upon him, his knife uplifted to deliver the final blow.

But, it never reached the heart of the Pawnee, for Buffalo Bill sprung from his hiding-place and hurled the Sioux backward from his prostrate enemy!

CHAPTER III.

A FRIEND FOR LIFE.

THAT the Pawnee chief was hurt there was no doubt, for he was bleeding from half a dozen wounds, but he arose to his feet, knife in hand, and stood glaring at his red foe, and also at the splendid-looking pale-face, who had saved him from certain death and acted not an instant too soon.

The Sioux had fallen heavily, when hurled backward by the scout, but still grasped his knife, though the foot of Buffalo Bill pinioned his arm down to the ground.

His other arm seemed helpless, for he thus lay quiet, but defiant and looking savagely at the man who had prevented him from killing his foe.

"The Death Dealer is badly wounded—let him drop his knife," said Buffalo Bill, speaking in the Sioux tongue.

"The Death Dealer is no coward dog; let the pale-face kill him!" was the defiant reply of the Sioux, while the Pawnee stood like a statue, gazing at both.

"The Pa-e-has-ka strikes not a wounded brave. He would spare the Death Dealer to go his way. Let him give up his knife."

But the reply was a defiant war-cry, and seeing that the Sioux was determined to die rather than yield, Buffalo Bill bent over, and by an effort of his giant strength, twisted the knife from the chief's hand, and threw it to one side.

As he did so he saw a change come over the face of the Indian; a strange hue showed beneath the war-paint; he gasped for breath, and Buffalo Bill knew that the Death Dealer had been continuing his fight after he had received his death wound! but though death-stricken, the implacable savage would have killed the Pawnee!

Suddenly the head of the Sioux fell back; his lips moved; he tried to utter his death-cry of defiance but the sound ended in a death-rattle and the chief was dead!

Quickly the scout turned to the Pawnee and said, speaking in his language:

"The Knife Killer is a great chief; he has slain the greatest of the Sioux chiefs in a personal combat, so the scalp, the pony, and the weapons of the Death Dealer are his.

"But the Knife Killer is wounded and the Pa-e-has-ka will dress his wounds and let him go his way."

The Pawnee looked at the scout in amazement. He had stood on guard, ready to fight the pale-face after the death of his red foe, for he certainly expected to have another combat to the death.

Yet, not only had the scout saved him from the last deadly blow, when at the mercy of the Sioux, but he now spoke to him as a brother, not as an enemy.

He could not understand it, and so still stood, bleeding from his wounds, gazing in wonder at the white man.

Seeing that he was indeed badly wounded, and would bleed to death, Buffalo Bill at once unbuckled his belt of arms and placing them at his feet, advanced unarmed apparently toward the red-skin.

"My red brother, the Knife Killer, is bleeding to death. I will help him," he said.

The Indian now realized that the scout did not intend to be hostile after all of his proof of friendship; and more, he could feel that he sadly needed aid, and so said, in a low tone:

"The great White Scalp Taker acts like

a brother to the Knife Killer. The Pawnee chief will trust him."

"You are wise, chief, for you are bleeding to death as fast as a horse can run," said Buffalo Bill in his dry way, and leading the Indian over to where his saddle was, he hastily took from a pocket in it a little case of medicines, lint, court-plaster and other things needed.

He glanced over the wounds, nine in number, with the eye of one used to such sights and experienced in caring for them, and quickly filling his canteen at the spring, he bathed off the one bleeding most freely, stanching the blood, and drew the gaping gash together and held it there with plaster.

The other wounds were then dressed in the order of their seriousness, and when all was done, the sun was just touching the horizon.

The eyes of the Indian had constantly wandered over toward the spot where lay the Death Dealer; he seemed to look as though the scalp of his foe would be as balm in Gilead to his wounds.

This Buffalo Bill saw and so said:

"Now tramp over and yank that scalp from the head of the Death Dealer, and you'll feel better; then come back and I'll have your blankets spread for you, and get some supper, for I happen to know that a dying Injun can eat a good meal, and you are only about half dead."

"Pa-e-has-ka great chief. Knife Killer his brother for life," said the Indian impressively.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKING BIG CHANCES.

WHEN the gory trophy of his victory, the scalp of Death Dealer the Sioux chief hung at his belt, the Knife Killer felt decidedly better!

The sharp twinges of pain from his wounds were as nothing to him in that moment of signal triumph.

The scout had brought his blankets from his pony and placed them in the shelter of the rocks near where he had spread his own.

Here he made the Indian lie down, while he secured the saddle and traps of the Sioux and placed them near him to look over, while he led the two ponies to where his own horse was and staked them out.

It was now dark, but Buffalo Bill had built a fire, sheltered from view by the rocks and surrounding thickets, and he was preparing a supper which greatly interested Knife Killer.

He had some juicy venison steaks, bacon, crackers and coffee, and he cooked enough to allow for the very liberal appetites of two men.

The Pawnee did not seem to wholly understand the situation.

There he was camping, being cared for and fed, and having had his life saved by a pale-face scout whom his people feared more than any other human being.

His people were at war with the pale-faces; the Pa-e-has-ka had often followed the trail of his braves and had led the soldiers to their villages, and his warriors had, time and again, fallen under his deadly aim; yet here he was with that same deadly foe as thick as two brothers.

Buffalo Bill had stanching his wounds and dressed them, had given over to him the trophies of his victory over the Sioux, and was now giving him a substantial supper!

Knife Killer ate in silence, either from being lost in thought, or not wishing to suspend eating for conversation.

Whatever the motive he ate heartily, and the scout encouraged him in the act.

When at last the meal was over, Knife Killer held out his gory hand for the scout to take.

Buffalo Bill ignored the gore and grasped it warmly.

"Knife Killer Pa-e-has-ka's friend."

"Yes, the pale-face and the red-skin are pals."

"The Knife Killer is badly wounded, and his white brother will take him to his people, to whom he will carry the scalp of the great chief, Death Dealer."

"The Death Dealer is a dog of a Sioux. He sent a runner to the village of the Pawnee

for the Knife Killer to meet him here and fight with knives.

"The Knife Killer came; the Pa-e-has-ka saw all."

"Knife Killer had given the Death Dealer a wound to kill, but his foot slipped; he fell, and the Sioux Chief would have killed him, too, had not the white chief been his friend."

"The heart of the Knife Killer is not bad; he loves his white brother for saving his life."

"He is badly wounded and would die, but for the care of the Pa-e-has-ka, for his village is far from here."

"If the white chief will go with him the people of the Knife Killer will be his friends; they will welcome him, and the tomahawk will be buried between the Knife Killer's people and the pale-faces."

"Are the ears of the white chief open?"

"You bet they are, chief, and drinking in all that Knife Killer says," answered Buffalo Bill, in his dry way.

"I am taking big chances," he continued, "to go to your village, for a bullet or an arrow quickly ends a life, and your young braves do not idolize me to any alarming extent, unless it is my scalp-lock; but I'll take the risk and go with you this once, for much good may come of it, if I can get the Pawnees allied with us against the Sioux."

"Yes, I'll go with you, Knife Killer, and accept your hospitality."

Finding that the chief spoke English fairly well, Buffalo Bill had spoken in that language, and though Knife Killer could not master all that the scout had said, he interpreted it his own way, as a compliment to himself and his people, and again held forth his hand for the scout to shake.

Buffalo Bill then filled the chief's pipe and his own with tobacco, and the two smoked together like old pals.

At last, after looking again to the wounds of the chief, Buffalo Bill said he would bury the dead Sioux, for the coyotes were howling about the body, and this duty of humanity done he followed the example of his red friend and went to sleep, for it was decided to start early the next morning for the Pawnee village, the daring scout determined to run the gantlet between life and death.

CHAPTER V.

A STRING OF SCALPS.

THE morning dawned to reveal to the astonished eyes of the Pawnee chief that he was lying peacefully within a few feet of his once most dreaded enemy.

He had suffered during the night, and once or twice had groaned with the pain of his wounds, and instantly the sound had caught the ear of Buffalo Bill who had risen and gone to him.

Once he had eased the pain by applying Pond's Extract which he had with him, and then, after a look at the horses and a scout around the timber he had returned to his blankets, the Indian grateful for his kindness to him.

Buffalo Bill knew that he was in a dangerous locality, a half-way ground, as it were, between the hostile tribes, and a day's ride from the fort.

He might run upon a scouting party of cavalry from the fort, but he was more apt to meet a band of hostile Sioux or Pawnees, so he was very cautious.

He got up early and cooked breakfast, and the chief still retained his appetite, though he was certainly suffering and Buffalo Bill feared that he was going to become worse.

He led his pony up for him, aided him to mount, and with the pony of the dead Sioux in lead, started on the trail for the village of the Pawnees, riding slowly as it was an effort for Knife Killer to sit on his horse.

It was nearing noon and Buffalo Bill was looking about for a camping-place for several hours' rest, when he glanced behind him and said quickly:

"We have got to ride for it, chief, and fight, too, for there are Sioux on our trail!"

Knife Killer glanced coolly behind him and said, with no show of uneasiness:

"Umph! Sioux come on our trail, find grave of chief and want scalp."

"White chief no fight for Pawnee, maybe die; him ride on and Knife Killer die like great chief."

"Just there, Pard Injun, you show that

your acquaintance with Buffalo Bill is limited, for I am not that kind of a man."

"There are just nine braves in that band, and we can cut that number down, a few, and I have no intention of letting them get my scalp, or yours, either."

"Good, brave pale-face chief!"

"Thanks; but there is a dandy place ahead, where we can stand them off, for it is a pool surrounded by rocks and sheltered by trees, while there is grass about the little basin and open prairie all around it."

"It is not half an acre in size and I have provisions for several days, not to speak of your supplies and those the chief Death Dealer had with him."

"Just hold yourself together, now, pard, and we'll strike a lope for the place I speak of."

It was evident that the greater speed caused the Pawnee great pain, but he stood it without a murmur, and in half an hour they came to the basin, the ideal spot for a small party of men to stand at bay.

The Indians on their trail had dashed forward more swiftly, when they discovered that they had been seen, and were but a mile behind when the scout and Knife Killer reached the basin.

Hastily unsaddling the horses and staking them out, Buffalo Bill said:

"Make yourself comfortable, chief, for you need rest, and if I have to call upon you I will do so."

"Me ready, now."

"No, lie down, and I'll take care of those fellows at the start," and the scout swung his rifle around for use.

The Indians still came on and, enraged at the death of their chief, for they had opened the grave and discovered his body, they determined to rush right on upon their foes, confident of their numbers, and not knowing just who they had to deal with."

Buffalo Bill calmly awaited their approach, measured the distance carefully, then raised his rifle and pulled trigger on the young chief who was in advance.

He dropped from the saddle at the crack of the rifle, a pony went down at the second shot, a warrior toppled over at the third, and with his wild, defiant war-cry, known to all the tribes on the prairies, Buffalo Bill sprung over the rocky basin, pumping out lead as he advanced upon the red skins.

His first shot had checked their rapid advance; his second had brought them to a halt; the third had made them half wheel as though to retreat, and when he appeared advancing upon them, his rifle rattling forth deadly hail as he did so, they turned in wild flight, for there was no shelter near.

The war-cry had told them who it was that faced them so boldly, and, as braves and ponies went down, thinning the nine warriors by three, and dropping four of their horses, they did not halt for their dead, but stampeded in wild flight, while after them rung the also dreaded war-cry of the Pawnee chief!

"Hello, chief, you here?" cried Buffalo Bill as he now beheld the Pawnee close behind him, staggering along with his own and the Sioux's rifle.

"Yes, me here. White chief heap brave."

"Well, we have settled those fellows and there is a string of scalps for you, for I don't raise the hair of my slain," said the scout.

But, Knife Killer did, and quickly took the three scalps, stripped the braves of their weapons, and then retreated with Buffalo Bill, who said:

"See here, chief, if you don't keep quiet I'll have you to bury yet, for you are in a bad way."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOST SCOUT.

COLONEL MABREY MARKHAM, the commandant of Fort Ready, sat in his quarters listening to the report of a captain of cavalry who had been absent for several days upon a special scouting expedition, the real cause for which was to find some trace of the chief of scouts, Buffalo Bill.

The chief of scouts had gone off alone several weeks before to try and discover if the Pawnees were threatening an attack upon the settlements or fort, and though he had said he would return within a week or ten days, he had not done so.

When more than two weeks had gone by and he failed to appear, Colonel Markham had grown most anxious regarding the popular scout and had sent Captain Oscar Emory and his troop to look him up.

The scout, Buttons, had accompanied the troop. He was known to be a good man on a trail and an old Indian-fighter, while he was devoted to his chief, Buffalo Bill.

But, when four days passed and the troop did not return, there was an officer at the fort who went to Colonel Markham's quarters and asked as a special favor to be allowed to go upon the trail in search of Cody, remarking:

"I am really alarmed now, colonel, for Cody's safety, and I would request leave to go in search of him."

That officer was the surgeon at Fort Ready, and yet one who had won fame as a scout and Indian-fighter second only to Buffalo Bill.

His name is Frank Powell, for he is still alive and a man of great popularity and holding high position in Wisconsin, the State of his adoption.

To the army known then as the "Fighting Surgeon," he was also known as a "Sharp-Shooter," while the Indians had given him the names of the "Magic Medicine-Man" and "White Beaver."

Between the Fighting Surgeon and Buffalo Bill there existed a friendship most devoted and true as steel, and many a desperate trail had they been on together, many a time did the one save the other's life.

"Well, Powell, Captain Emory has not returned, and as I am growing anxious for his safety as well as Buffalo Bill's, and I know well you your skill as a scout, I will let you go on the hunt for them."

"Who do you wish to take with you?"

So said Colonel Markham in answer to the Fighting Surgeon's request.

"No one, sir, save an extra horse, which I will use as a pack-animal, as I wish to go well supplied."

"I wish you had gone with Emory; but a troop is at your service if you wish."

"Thank you, no one. I prefer to go alone."

And that night the Fighting Surgeon started alone upon the trail!

The next afternoon in came Captain Emory and his troop, and the colonel was listening to the report of that officer, when the two are presented to the reader.

Colonel Markham was a handsome man of fifty, a soldier with a record, a man of means, and a bachelor who had escaped all the traps set for him in army circles and out, by widows and designing mothers with pretty daughters for sale, or that is, who had arrived at an age when eligible partners were being looked out for for them.

There was society at the fort, and a charming military family it was of some half a hundred ladies and children, with lovely girls galore, and yet the handsome and rich colonel stood more chance of being ambushed by an Indian than he did of being captured by a woman.

Captain Oscar Emory was one of the pets of the fort, popular with commandant, officers, men and the ladies, and he had deservedly won his spurs on many a hard-fought field.

When he had gone on the hunt for Buffalo Bill, with Buttons as his scout, all predicted that he would find him or learn his fate.

Then anxiety began to be felt for the captain and his men, but he came in in safety.

He had had a brush with a band of Sioux, and handled them roughly, and he had noticed that they had a captive in their midst, a white man, and Private Frank Fenton, who had gotten much nearer the Indians than any one else, making a dash into their midst and rescuing Lieutenant Felix Armstrong, who was wounded slightly and fallen beneath his horse, which was killed, had reported that the Sioux prisoner was a man in appearance very much like Buffalo Bill.

The band of Indians had been driven in retreat as far as Captain Emory dared venture with his small force, and returning to the fort, they had met Surgeon Powell, who was following a small trail which he said he would stick to with the hope of making some discovery regarding the missing scout.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHTING SURGEON ON THE TRAIL.

DOCTOR FRANK POWELL started upon the trail in search of Buffalo Bill like one who made a business of what he had to do, and one who knew just what was before him.

Buffalo Bill had given him an idea of the way he would go before he left the fort, and the Fighting Surgeon felt sure that he could soon discover by his trail whether he had gone first to the Pawnee or Sioux country, and knowing this he would know better where to look for him.

It had been a long time for any trace of an ordinary trail to last, but then there had been no rain and he knew the hoof-tracks of Cody's horse well.

He went first to a small stream which Buffalo Bill would be sure to cross if he went to the Pawnee country before he did to that of the Sioux, for both tribes living in the mountains they were yet divided by a wide valley through which flowed a river with a swift current and banks only here and there broken so that a descent and crossing be made.

If there was no trace of Buffalo Bill's trail at the stream referred to, Surgeon Powell would make a bee line for a place lower down the river where Buffalo Bill would cross if he went first to the Sioux country.

The surgeon was thoroughly equipped for a long trail, being amply supplied with provisions and ammunition, while he carried on his pack-horse an extra Winchester rifle for use in close quarters.

The pack-horse was as fine an animal as was the one he rode, and the pack was not too heavy to carry on the horse he rode should he be so unfortunate as to lose one of his animals.

With eyes as keen as an eagle, a nerve of iron, indomitable will and endurance that was wonderful, while he was a skilled trailer and Indian-fighter, Frank Powell was the very man to go in search of a pard whom he regarded as he did a brother.

Going first to the little stream he camped there for breakfast, for he had left the fort at night, and a short search showed him that the scout had crossed there, for his trail was still visible.

This was proof that Buffalo Bill had gone up into the Pawnee country, and striking off upon it the Fighting Surgeon followed it as well as he could, keeping as directly as possible on the course the scout would be most likely to follow when no trace of a track was visible.

It was upon the next morning that he met Captain Oscar Emory and his command, and heard the report of that officer, and what the opinion was of Buttons and Private Frank Fenton regarding the capture of Buffalo Bill.

"I hardly think Bill has been caught napping, or allowed himself to be penned up in a trap; but if he is a prisoner I must know it, so I will push on as I am going. Captain Emory, and if I make any discovery I will come at once to the fort for aid," said the Fighting Surgeon, and so he parted with the troop and continued on his way alone.

He was looking about for a noon camping-place when he suddenly crossed the tracks he was following.

It was a fresh trail, or rather made some time after the one going to the Indian country, and was leading in the direction of the Sioux country.

Of course one so well skilled in plaincraft as Surgeon Powell at once turned upon the last trail, and as he did so he decided that Buffalo Bill had been up into the Pawnee country, and making no discovery of an intended raid of those Indians, was going to take a look at the Sioux.

The trail was far more easily followed than had been the one made some time before, and it showed that the scout had been riding leisurely along.

At last a clump of timber was visible ahead, and as the trail led toward this the Fighting Surgeon rode on more rapidly.

Something seemed to impress him with the idea that he would make some discovery in that timber, and before long he came upon a fresh trail of no less than nine ponies.

"Ah! Bill had red-skins following him! I

sincerely hope that he found a good standing-off place in yonder timber, which I do not remember to have ever visited," muttered the surgeon, and he urged his horse on more rapidly.

But as he drew near the timber he approached cautiously, peered keenly into it with his glass and soon after rode upon a pack of coyotes hovering about well-picked human bones.

"Ah! there was a tragedy here."

"I must see to this," and the Fighting Surgeon hastily dismounted and began to gather the scattered bones together.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIG MEDICINE READING "SIGNS."

To one not skilled in anatomy as was the Surgeon Scout, the bones of a single human being, of a form as large as that of Buffalo Bill, taken into consideration with the trail of the nine red-skins, it would have been supposed that the non-return to the fort of the scout was caused by his having been slain.

But Surgeon Powell quickly saw that the skull, so well picked of all flesh by the coyotes and vultures, was that of an Indian, and he muttered:

"Sioux, and a large fellow he was."

"Instead of killing Cody, he got in his work on Mister Red-skin."

"But the body was buried, I see, and by a white man, for no Indian dug that grave."

"And then the body was torn out of the grave, and not by the coyotes either."

"I will stop here over night, reconnoiter and try and find out just what has taken place."

So the Fighting Surgeon went into camp for the night, and his close observation of the surroundings resulted in his discovering that there had been two other trails, other than the scout's, leading to the timber about the same time that Buffalo Bill had arrived and coming from opposite directions.

The track of the nine ponies was apparently of more recent date, and three tracks left the timber together, leading from a small camp among the rocks, while the nine tracks followed on after the others.

"This is the way I go," decided Doctor Frank, when he had closely put all the threads he had picked up, together, and saw that Buffalo Bill's horse went off with the two Indian ponies.

"I think Buffalo Bill must have surprised those two Indians, killed one and bagged the other; but why did he not come on to the fort with his prisoner?" said the surgeon thoughtfully, and he added:

"Maybe those nine red-skins are the cause."

"I will know to-morrow."

He camped in the timber all night, and at the first peep of day was in the saddle and off on the trail.

It was nearing noon when he came to where the scout and Knife Killer had stood at bay, and he read the signs he saw there well, for he drove the coyotes away from the slain Indian ponies, and found a grave which he knew held several bodies.

At once he set to work to open the grave, which he knew had been dug by a white man, while in the little timber island was the remains of a recent camp, and the tracks of three horses, two ponies, and the shod horse of Buffalo Bill.

The grave revealed three dead Indians, and that they had been scalped the Surgeon Sharp-Shooter at once discovered.

He filled in the grave and muttered to himself:

"Cody was at bay here, and he must have made his Indian captive help him stand off the pursuers, for he did some hot work."

"But who scalped the three dead Sioux, for Sioux they are, and is Cody's captive a Sioux the others were trying to rescue, or a Pawnee?"

"That is a question I cannot answer, but from what I have seen matters do not look very bright for Bill's safety, so I must hasten on, for if he is a captive Colonel Markham will make a bold effort to save him, for Pawnee or Sioux will show Cody no mercy."

"As the trail goes in this direction the red-skin with Cody must be a Pawnee, and

now I think of it perhaps Buffalo Bill is the captive."

Again starting upon the trail, Surgeon Powell discovered that Buffalo Bill's horse and the two Indian ponies continued on together, and at a very slow pace.

There was evidence of frequent camps made, and short distances traveled between the camping places.

The delays that Surgeon Powell had met with had of course put him back considerably on the trail, but he pressed on and did not camp until it was too dark to see the trail he followed, and which, having been made quite a while before, was very indistinct.

He had left the prairie country and was looking for a noon camp the following day when he heard distant firing.

He quickly drew rein and listened, and the shots came distinctly to his ears.

At once he rode on and at a gallop, his pack-horse keeping up without urging.

Coming to an opening in the timber on the range he was crossing he halted, hitched his horses and creeping to some rocks peered over into the valley beyond.

What he saw caused him to quickly unslung his rifle for use.

CHAPTER IX.

RENDERING GOOD SERVICE.

THE sight which Surgeon Powell beheld was a stirring one.

He looked over a precipitous mountain-side into a valley, wherein, something like half a mile from the range where he was, he beheld a little rocky spur, or hill in which some one had taken shelter to battle for life.

Around this spur were half a hundred redskins, and his experienced eye quickly told him that they were Sioux.

They were dismounted, but their ponies were not very far behind them, also forming a circle around the hill where the party was at bay.

The Sioux were concealed by what places of shelter they could find, a rock, a fallen tree, thicket, and in several cases a dead pony, of which there were four visible.

Who the party in the hill-top was, standing bravely at bay, the Fighting Surgeon could only conjecture, for they were concealed from him.

But from the top of a tree rising above the thicket of pines on the hill fluttered a small United States flag, and Frank Powell muttered:

"Buffalo Bill always carries a small flag with him, and there is no party out from the fort so it must be he.

"If not, it is some small party on the way to the fort.

"There, that was a good shot at long range, and hark! those yells from the hill are Pawnee battle-cries," and the Fighting Surgeon referred to a shot which had killed a Sioux and which was followed by war-cries from the party at bay on the hill.

"That flag bothers me, when the war-cries showed that there are Pawnees on the hill.

"Can Buffalo Bill be there, I wonder?

"If so, the Pawnees are his foes as much as are the Sioux.

"Well, I fight for the flag, whoever it waves over; and I have a good chance to open lively from here, and should bring down four or five Sioux before they can hunt cover, and stampeding them will give the party at bay a chance also to pick them off.

"Yes, I'll give a bugle-call, showing myself at one place, then mount and let them see me, and quickly coming back here will open fire and empty both of my Winchesters, which will make them believe there is a troop of cavalry coming to the rescue.

"Yes, I'll show my flag, too."

With this Surgeon Powell went to his pack saddle and took out a small United States flag and fastened it to a stick, after which he got out a small bugle, and went to a point of rocks where he could be plainly seen, when attention was attracted to him.

He had left his horses at another point, where he could show them, and his Winchesters were ready at the place where he had been when he made the discovery of the Sioux besieging the party on the hill-top.

All this time the rifles on both sides were cracking and arrows flying in both directions.

Suddenly revealing himself upon the rocky point, the Fighting Surgeon placed the bugle to his lips and clear, sharp, ringing sounded the notes of warning.

The first note caught the ears of Sioux and Pawnees alike, and wild yells came from the latter.

Dashing back from the point Surgeon Powell threw himself into his saddle and spurred into view at another opening, waving the flag he carried.

Again he disappeared, and a minute after he had reached his Winchesters, and as he saw that the Sioux were retreating to their ponies, followed by a ringing fire from the hill-top he cried:

"That is Buffalo Bill's rifle speaking now, and it is doing splendid work.

"I will join in the concert, I guess! He'll recognize my music, I am sure."

And the rifle of the Surgeon Scout also began to rattle.

As soon as it was emptied he seized the second one, and by the time he had fired the last shot from this, the Sioux were in a perfect stampede all around the hill, rushing for their ponies, and riding toward a common center beyond to join their forces and go in rapid retreat.

But they did not escape scathless, for the Fighting Surgeon had brought down several braves and ponies, and driving them from cover those in the hill-top had also killed others, while loud and clear rung the battle-cry of Buffalo Bill, it being promptly answered by the brave officer who had rendered him and those with him such splendid service in time of greatest need.

Seeing the Indian besiegers were in full flight Surgeon Powell mounted his horse and waving his flag showed himself to them as they fled.

CHAPTER X.

INDIAN ALLIES.

"WELL, Bill, I have found you I am glad to say, for I was on your trail; but come, I advise that you start upon the back trail the way I came, for those Sioux may not be so badly scared as not to turn and see that but one man stampeded them."

"One man worth a score any day, Doc; but do you mean that you are alone?"

"Yes, Bill, except my pack-horse hitched back yonder on the range," and Surgeon Powell pointed back to his position.

"But the bugler, color-bearer and mounted men I saw and the Sioux saw too?"

"One and the same, yours truly, Buffalo Bill."

"Just like you, Doc, to make a bigger show of force for one man than a dozen really ordinary men could make.

"You were on my trail then?"

"Yes, but get your band started on the trail and then I'll tell you all, and how glad I am to see that you are alive, for all are most anxious about you at the fort."

"I'll move at once," and Buffalo Bill turned toward several Pawnee braves who stood near him.

Surgeon Powell had mounted his horse, when the Sioux stampeded, and rode down toward the spur, and Buffalo Bill had come down to meet him apart.

When he spoke to the Pawnees they ran back into their retreat, which had served them so well, and instantly there appeared a score of splendid-looking young braves, all well mounted, but armed only with bows and arrows and lassoes.

Behind them came a motley crowd, also mounted, of whites, nine in number and a negro man and woman.

"They were captives to the Pawnees," explained Buffalo Bill to Surgeon Powell, and he added:

"They were released by chief Knife Killer, and are returning with me to the fort, while the young braves are acting as an escort and are the dandiest lot of lasso-throwers I ever saw."

"Well, Bill, you seem to have struck it rich up in the Pawnee country, and I am most impatient to hear your story.

"If you can trust your Lariat League of red-men to go on alone, let us ride up to the

ridge yonder and show ourselves to the Sioux that they may be encouraged to continue their flight, for when I first saw but half a hundred I found when they fled that there were fully double that number."

"Yes, all of that, though altogether with your aid we cut down their number by a score.

"We were jumped by them last night, and fortunately were near that hill which was a good retreat for us.

"One of the captives, an old man, and two of the Red Lassoists were killed, however, and several are slightly wounded.

"I am ready now to ride forward with you, Doc."

"All right, but get on to your Red Lariat-Throwers, will you?"

Buffalo Bill saw that the young braves were very coolly scalping the dead Sioux, and he remarked:

"Oh, yes, they are right in line in hair-raising, and it will help us to have them take back a few scalps with them."

The party now being on the trail by which the Surgeon Scout had come, the latter with Buffalo Bill dashed forward to the ridge over which the Sioux had retreated.

The Indians had halted a mile away, but upon seeing the two horsemen come into sight they rapidly moved on once more, and were encouraged by a few shots from the Winchesters, which, in spite of the distance, dropped their bullets into their midst.

"Yes, they are all of a hundred, I see; but they are demoralized and we have nothing to fear from them now.

"See, as we do not pursue they are hastening their flight, evidently thinking that troops are moving around the ridge to flank them."

"That's what they think, Frank, so we will wait here to encourage them in their flight, and meanwhile you can tell me how it is that you happen here just in the nick of time, for rifles were scarce in my outfit, and ammunition mighty low."

"Well, Bill, you did not turn up on time, so, after waiting awhile for you to come in, Colonel Markham sent Captain Oscar Emory and his troop after you, and I followed later.

"I met Emory on his return, the scout, Buttons, having reported that he saw a white captive in the hands of a band of Sioux with whom they had a brush, and Private Frank Fenton also saw him, and both said that it was you.

"But I came on and here I am, so now to your story, Bill."

"See there, Doc," and Buffalo Bill pointed to a much larger band of Sioux now filing into sight.

CHAPTER XI.

THE "BIG MEDICINE" COURIER.

SURGEON POWELL needed no warning from Buffalo Bill at what he saw.

The retreating Indians, now a couple of miles away, had come to a sudden halt.

They were coming slowly along until a signal came from those in retreat, when they at once rode forward at a canter.

"There are a couple of hundred of them, Bill."

"Yes, Frank, and more to come, for see that fellow on the ridge is signaling to others that are not in sight to us."

"You are right, and our place is to make tracks with full speed."

"Just so, but to try and check pursuit by a show of camping on the range and having force enough to check them."

"You mean by building camp-fires, now that night is coming on?"

"Yes, and then pushing on through the night with all speed, while I dash on to the fort for aid, and you take command of the outfit."

"No, Bill: this is your picnic, and you stay with the captives and lasso-throwing guard. It is I who will ride to the fort for aid.

"Yes, there come others into view, so we have now about four hundred Sioux on our trail."

"Then we will ride for it, Frank," and the two friends dashed on up to the top of the range, where the party had halted.

A few words explained the situation, and while the captives rode on with several o

the braves, Buffalo Bill and the other Pawnees set to work to build a number of camp-fires on the range, for night was near at hand, and the idea was to make the Sioux believe a large force of cavalry was camped there.

By this ruse the little party could get a full night's start it was hoped.

She Surgeon Scout having decided to be the courier to the fort stripped his horse of all extra weight, carried only a little food, and after a few words to Buffalo Bill, started off, determined to reach the fort in the shortest time possible.

He knew the country well, and would follow no trails, taking a course as the crow flies, as near as it was possible to do so, and hoping to reach the fort by noon the next day, and at once start a force of cavalry to the rescue.

At the fort anxiety deepened for the fate of Buffalo Bill, and a dread was also felt that the desire of Surgeon Powell to rescue his friend would cause him to be even more reckless than was his wont.

Since Captain Emory's return there was a general gloom over the fort, for Buffalo Bill was popular with all; he was the idol of his band of scouts, and a great favorite with all the officers, who always treated him as though he held a commission.

Colonel Markham had begun to consider the request of Buttons the scout to go out with the company of Men in Buckskin under the command of Buffalo Bill, to search for their chief, and to send with them Captain Emory and a couple of troops of cavalry.

He had just decided that he would do so, when it was reported to him that a horseman was coming rapidly to the fort.

The colonel soon learned that the horseman was urging the animal he rode hard, and soon after that his horse had fallen with him, and failing to rise, the rider had at once started on for the fort at a run.

Instantly a led horse was dispatched to his aid, and met him a mile from the fort, when he was seen to mount and dash on at full speed.

"It is Surgeon Powell!" cried the officer of the day as his glass revealed the straps on his shoulders, and he recognized the tall form and handsome face of the daring officer-scout.

A cheer went up from the men as the Fighting Surgeon dashed into the fort and, raising his hat courteously, rode rapidly on to headquarters, threw himself from his saddle, and was met by the colonel with extended hand and the words:

"Welcome back, Powell. You have news of Cody?"

"Yes, sir, and will you order a troop at once ready for a hard ride, sir, with two others and a couple of light guns to follow, for there is a large force of Sioux hot on the trail of Cody, and a party of captives, men, women and children brought from the Pawnee village.

"I will guide the relief, sir, by the most direct trail to the rescue."

Colonel Markham saw that Surgeon Powell was in deadly earnest, and he at once ordered a troop in readiness, with Cody's band of scouts as well, with a couple of other troops and two light guns to follow with supplies as soon as they could be gotten ready.

Then he said

"You have ridden hard, Surgeon Powell, and your face shows it."

"I hardly thought it possible to reach here before noon, sir, but it is just nine o'clock.

"I killed my horse, but that is of small matter in a rescue of human life.

"I left Cody at dark last night, sir, and the demand for aid is most urgent.

"I will go to my quarters, sir, and be back in time to guide the relief."

"But, you are not able to go, Powell."

"Oh, yes, sir, for I am as tough as a pine knot, you know."

"But tell me something of Cody and those captives."

"I can tell you nothing, colonel, as I know only that I came upon Cody, his captives and a band of young Pawnee braves, who are, strange to say, his allies.

"They were in a tight place, besieged by Sioux, and my coming gave them a loophole of escape, when other Sioux appeared and Buffalo Bill, the captives and the Paw-

nees are pushing for the fort with all speed and about half a thousand hostiles upon their trail, while I came as a courier for aid."

"And nobly have you done your work, Surgeon Powell; but I dislike to see you tax yourself so severely, when the scouts can guide the expedition."

"I know the direct trail, sir, and can save several hours, and that means much.

"I will go, sir, and be ready when the command is," and the Fighting Surgeon hastened to his own quarters to prepare for the long trail.

CHAPTER XII.

FLYING FOR LIFE.

WHEN Surgeon Powell had left the party under Buffalo Bill the latter prepared to make the best of his situation, but said to the captives, who seemed to feel that they were doomed to be captured now by the more cruel Sioux:

"If any man on earth can bring us aid Doctor Powell is that man.

"He has a wonderful horse there, and he knows the country thoroughly, so while he is striving to help us we must do all that we can for ourselves."

The camp-fires along the ridge had been built, were a score in number, and the women and children had been sent on ahead, one of the braves serving as guide toward the fort, while Buffalo Bill and the Lasso-Throwers remained behind to check any advance of the Sioux.

Reconnoitering with his glass, Buffalo Bill felt sure that the Sioux would not tarry longer than the first peep of day to advance, and be ready in position then to attack.

Of course they would find their foes gone, but with the captives and several wounded, the party could not travel very fast, and it was a long trail to the fort, so that the Sioux, if well mounted, could overtake them by the following night.

Buffalo Bill set the pace of retreat, slow but sure, halting when necessary for rest, and at dawn they had gone all of twenty miles over the mountain trail.

They felt sure that this distance at least was between them and their pursuers, yet could not hope that it would long remain thus.

There was a long halt then made for rest and breakfast, and when the march was resumed again the pace was more brisk, as by daylight they could better see their way.

Arriving at a range through which the trail wound, the Pawnee braves halted and talked together excitedly for a few minutes, and when Buffalo Bill came up he learned from them that they were anxious to ambush the Sioux there.

The scout examined the position and saw that the braves could hide themselves there, leave their horses on ahead, deliver a fire upon the Sioux, and then running to their ponies, who would have had a rest, readily escape before they could be attacked by the main force.

"It is a good idea, and I will be with you," said Buffalo Bill, and then he told them that from a point some distance back he had seen the advance guard of the Sioux pushing on.

"There were about fifty of them, as well as I could see with my glass, and they must be well ahead of the others," he explained to the braves.

Then word was sent ahead for those in the lead to push on until they came to a good camping-place, and one that could be well defended, for the horses were getting tired out and on account of the women and children the scout felt that a halt must be made, perhaps a stand at bay to fight for life, and that the ambush contemplated would check the Sioux he fondly hoped.

The ponies of the young braves were staked out a mile beyond the ambush, and the party went into hiding along the top of a cliff at the base of which the trail ran, and thirty feet beneath them.

The plan was to deliver a hot fire upon the advance and then fly while they were in disorder, cutting off as they could by being on foot, a distance of a quarter of a mile which one mounted would have to ride.

It was a wait of little over an hour when the Sioux advance came in sight, and every

Pawnee stood ready with bow and arrow, while Buffalo Bill crouched in a position from which he could deliver a raking fire with his Winchester.

There were some sixty Sioux in the advance, and this was a sure indication that they had a large force following, one they knew was strong enough to dare go near the fort with.

The Sioux were pressing their ponies hard, for they had discovered by the trail that there were not over thirty in the party they were pursuing, and they wanted every scalp in the outfit.

They had also seen that they had run from a false alarm, that there had been no cavalry force come to the rescue, no soldiers around the camp-fires, and the rapid retreat of their enemy showed that no help was near at hand, while, as they expected to have a long start, and they would not expect the Sioux to push near the fort, they would be the more readily overtaken.

Enraged at their losses, their being driven off by a ruse and the escape of their foes, the best mounted men were pushed ahead to capture the fugitives or bring them to a halt until the whole force came up.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAIR CAPTIVE.

ON came the Sioux, their ponies pushed hard, for they felt that their foes could not be over six miles ahead and they must catch them before sunset.

That a small force such as they were would halt for an ambush, or a fight, they did not consider, and hence they rode into the gap with no thought of danger to suddenly have come down upon them a perfect shower of arrows, a silent rain of death.

And following this rung out the deadly music of Buffalo Bill's repeating rifle, and the air seemed filled with dark, whirling clouds as a score of lassoes went swirling downward to catch over the heads and forms of the surprised, terrified and struggling mass of red humanity in the narrow gap.

Out of the three score that had met that silent shower of deadly arrows, had faced the rattling ring of Cody's rifle and then been entangled in the fatal coils of the lassoes, about half went down, the others wheeling about and flying almost without a return fire.

With wild yells of triumph the deadly Lasso-Throwers then felt no desire to fly to their ponies, but half falling, half leaping down the steep sides of the canyon, they sprung among the dead and dying Sioux with their scalping-knives and each one of the Lasso-Throwers waved aloft one or more gory scalps in triumph.

But the warning cry of the cool-headed white chief called them to retreat, and away they sped on foot ere the amazed advance guard of the Sioux had rallied in their flight when seeing that they were not pursued.

It was a rapid, hard run to their horses, and mounting, they pushed on, frenzied with joy over the deadly blow they had struck, while at their head rode Buffalo Bill, stern and determined, as he muttered:

"I want this band of Pawnees for Indian scouts to fight the Sioux with, and allied with my brave Boys in Buckskin at the fort, I would not fear to face ten times our numbers."*

The young braves rode along elated over their victory, and regarding their white chief with more awe and admiration than ever, for he had planned the blow and retreat, though the thought had occurred to them.

Then, too, they had seen the deadly execution of his matchless rifle, and they were sure that he could lead them again to victory.

Overtaking the captives, Buffalo Bill found that they had halted in a piece of timber just off the trail, and through which wound a small stream.

There was a rise there, with open country about them, while beyond for many miles there were level plains, and no chance to stand at bay if overtaken there.

* Buffalo Bill did much to introduce friendly Indians into the army, and his Pawnee Scouts afterward became a battalion under Major Frank North, of Nebraska.

It was only a little after noon, and yet Buffalo Bill decided to press on no further, but stand at bay there, for the force of Indians would not come up much before night, and a general attack would hardly be made before the next morning, and by that time, knowing Surgeon Powell as he did, he was pretty sure that aid would not be very far away.

Then, too, they were nearly fifty miles nearer the fort than when the Fighting Surgeon started on his long ride for help, so the rescue party would have that much less to ride.

So, all things considered, Buffalo Bill decided to make his stand there, and he was glad to see from the nature of the timber, that another ambush could be laid.

To do this, as the trail to the timber showed distinctly, he had all the ponies led on beyond it to arise a couple of miles away, and there he built several fires, so that the smoke would indicate a camp.

Back then over the trail the ponies were led and they were hidden under the bank of the stream so that they could not be seen by the approaching Indians.

There was fallen timber there too, and this was all arranged as a breastwork, where the party could lie in ambush.

To any one approaching the timber not a sign of an ambush could be seen, while the trail leading on beyond would indicate that only a noonday halt had been made there.

The women and children were placed in shelter under the bank of the stream, two of the captive white men volunteering to aid in the defense, though armed only with bows and arrows, while a young girl of eighteen, the daughter of the old man who had been killed back at the last retreat, said bluntly:

"I will use my father's rifle and do the part of a man, as death has no terrors to me."

Buffalo Bill urged against this, but the brave girl would not lend the rifle to one of the white men, and was so determined that he yielded with the remark:

"You are as plucky as you are pretty, miss."

"I am not a coward, and if I am pretty I don't know it, for since I was twelve I have been a captive among the Pawnees."

"Like a dream it comes to me now of a home, with a mother and sisters and a brother; but the Sioux came and murdered all and made my father and myself captives."

"The Pawnees captured us from the Sioux, and thus we have lived, so I am as much Indian as pale face."

"I hate the Sioux, so will fight them," and the girl's eyes flashed fire at the memory of her past.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LIFE LIFT.

BUFFALO BILL gazed with admiration upon the young girl who had given him the story of her past, her unhappy life.

Her father he had noticed was a man of education and refinement in the past, and though but fifty years of age, his daughter had said, his hair and beard were white as snow.

He had, as a captive of the Sioux, taken from them later by the Pawnees, at once asked to become as an Indian member of the tribe, and this had been readily granted by the Pawnees, and he had risen to be a medicine-chief in their tribe, for he was a physician and had rendered them great service as such.

Why he had done so, had allied himself to the Indians as one of them, Buffalo Bill had understood even before the unfortunate captive had said to him:

"I turned red-skin, Mr. Cody, to save my child."

"The Pawnees had done me no harm, but rather had taken us from the Sioux who had killed my wife and other children, burned my home and run off my cattle, making me a beggar in one night."

"As a medicine chief my daughter was respected among the Pawnees, and I only waited with the hope that some day we would be rescued."

"That day has come and you alone are our rescuer."

"I go back to what God only knows;

but if I should fall in this fight with the Sioux, I beg you to care for my child."

An hour after the utterance of these words the man was dead, slain by the side of his daughter by the Sioux in their attack on the party at bay in the hill.

Thus was it that Singing Dove, as the Pawnees called the young girl, was left to the guardianship of Buffalo Bill, and fearing that she might meet her father's fate he had urged that she remain under the shelter of the bank with the other captives.

But he urged in vain, as, armed with her father's rifle she took her place near the scout, as he lay in ambush, with the grim determination to do her part in the fight for life, skillful sharpshooter that she was.

The sun was yet a couple of hours high when Buffalo Bill, who had been perched up in a tree, looking back over the trail through his field glass, gave a warning cry that indicated that the Sioux were coming.

They were yet a couple of miles away, and the scout had noticed that there was, as before, an advance guard.

But this time it was larger than the one that before had ridden into the ambush in the gap.

There were fully a hundred now ahead, and they were keeping well up.

To the scout's idea this indicated that at least four times that force were following, and he only hoped that Surgeon Powell would bring soldiers enough to not only drive them back, but be able to give them a very severe handling.

"They must be over an hour ahead of their main force, and the latter will hardly be up before sunset, so as they will not attack at night we will have until dawn to look for help and prepare to fight them," said Buffalo Bill as he took his position in the line.

But his words were heard by Singing Dove who replied:

"If we can punish them severely here, they will be very cautious about advancing then, unless they hasten on their whole band and charge us before night, for, as you say, the Sioux will not fight at night."

Buffalo Bill gazed at the girl admiringly. She was tall, slender and graceful.

Her costume was a buckskin skirt, fringed leggings, a tight-fitting waist and feather head-dress, and she had shown much taste in making an attire that was very becoming.

Darkly bronzed though she was, and with blonde hair worn in long braids, she would never have been mistaken for an Indian maiden in spite of her attire.

Her eyes were a deep blue, large and very expressive, her teeth even and white, and her features perfect.

"You do not seem to have any fear, Singing Dove," said the scout, calling her by her Indian name.

"No, I have nothing to live for, and the grave, my father always told me, was perfect rest."

"But, here come the Sioux," and her voice never changed its tone.

"Yes, and they come on with no dread of an ambush here, for the trail leading beyond deceives them."

Then in the Pawnee tongue he told his braves, the two white men and Singing Dove, to await until his first shot as a signal for them to fire, and added:

"I shall pick off the chief on the yellow pony."

The Pawnee braves were growing uneasy under the long delay of the scout in firing, for the Sioux were not over a hundred yards away.

But Buffalo Bill seemed in no hurry.

He deemed it best to have them near enough for the arrows to do good execution, rather than fire at a distance beyond their range.

Nearer and nearer came the Sioux until the Pawnees became terribly excited at their coming so close, and then there rung out a single shot.

It was the scout's signal and the chief on the yellow pony fell, while a second shot brought down another chief by his side.

That second shot was fired by Singing Dove, and a shower of Pawnee arrows followed it, while the rapid rattle of Buffalo Bill's Winchester told that the fight for life had begun.

CHAPTER XV.

A MOMENTOUS CRISIS.

THE Sioux were pushing along at as rapid a pace as their tired ponies could carry them.

They were riding well up together, but lolling in their saddles as though tired out themselves.

As soon as they had come in sight of the little clump of timber, their keen vision had detected the well-marked trail leading beyond it, as though the fugitives had only made a short halt there.

As they had not before visited the timber they did not realize the splendid advantage it presented for a place of shelter and an ambush.

They thought they could see through it, and that foes lurked there, wary as they were, never entered their minds.

Afar off on the plain they detected the smoke of camp-fires, and it was just there where the fugitives should be, and with the level plain before them for many a long mile, they rejoiced that they would catch their foes without shelter.

The body of Sioux recoiled as though they had run upon a line of bayonets, when the scout's shot killed their chief, the second shot from Singing Dove brought down their next leader, and then followed the shower of arrows, the ringing of the Winchester, not fired at random, but to kill, and the rattle of the revolvers of the scout, in the hands of the two white men captives.

Down went warriors and ponies, and stunned, hurt, bleeding and demoralized the Sioux reeled backward rapidly until they ended in a perfect stampede to save life.

Back to the shelter of the hill they had just left they retreated, while, wild with joy the Lasso-Throwers rushed from their retreat and began to strike down the wounded and tear their red trophy of battle from the heads of their foes.

"The Pawnees have taken more Sioux scalps under your lead, white chief, than has fallen to them in many a day," said Singing Dove, as she stood by the scout, gazing upon the scene with a look of satisfaction rather than pity or regret.

"You do not appear shocked at the scene," said the scout, rather coldly.

"Why should I, for did I not tell you that I was half Indian in my nature now, did I not tell you that it was the Sioux who killed my mother and my sisters and brothers, and only yesterday it was my father who fell by their hands."

"No, I have no mercy for them, no pity, and the scalp of the chief I killed I shall wear at my belt, for the young Sioux slayer told me he would bring it to me."

As the Singing Dove spoke, the Sioux slayer, the young leader of the Lasso-Throwers, advanced with several scalps, one of which, with a war-bonnet he banded to the young girl, and, as she had said, fastened it to her belt with the remark:

"See, white chief?"

"I cannot blame you, poor girl," said Buffalo Bill sadly, and he added in an undertone:

"She is indeed a half Indian by nature, and one can hardly wonder at it."

Then he turned to arrange his plans for the attack of the Sioux, which he knew would not be delayed if they arrived before night fell in force, or if after darkness set in, by the dawn of the following day.

The Lasso-Throwers were placed under their young chief Sioux Slayer, so as to do the most affective work with their bows and arrows, the two men with the scout's revolvers were given advantageous positions, and with them he put Singing Dove with her rifle, while he determined to move from point to point with his Winchester.

To have gone on, with the ponies broken down almost, and delayed by the helpless captives and wounded, Buffalo Bill knew would be to have the Sioux overtake them at night upon the open plain where there was no shelter as where they then were.

Supper was prepared and all partook of it, and then, as the sun touched the horizon Buffalo Bill saw the Sioux filing out of the hills.

They came slowly and in two columns, three abreast. Each column branched off as they left the hills, one to the right, the

other to the left, and this meant that they intended to surround the timber, to completely hem in their foes.

They seemed in no hurry, and were evidently pent up with rage at the defeats they had met with, but were patient enough to take a night's rest and overwhelm their foes in the morning.

And as Buffalo Bill saw those two columns file out on the plain, growing larger and larger, he began to count them until at last he muttered to himself:

"There are many more than I thought, nearly a thousand in number."

"They we are all to die by the hands of the Sioux?" coolly said Singing Dove who had heard him.

"One only hope now is in the Fighting Surgeon," was the scout's reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SURGEON SCOUT'S DISCOVERY.

It was Surgeon Frank Powell who set the pace of the first party sent to the rescue of Cody and the captives.

Colonel Markham had decided to send Captain Emory and two troops, also the band of Buffalo Bill's scouts, and have three extra troops and four guns follow as quickly after as they could be gotten off.

He feared that the force might be larger to contend with than Surgeon Powell had reported, and less than two troops of cavalry would not do effective work.

So it happened that five cavalry companies and a battery of four six-pounders, three hundred and thirty men in all, were dispatched to the rescue, Captain Emory, leaving an hour after Surgeon Powell's arrival, and the second force, under Major Melton, following in little over an hour behind him, though he did not travel at as rapid a pace.

It was just after nightfall when Surgeon Powell, who was in the lead, and showed no sign of fatigue, came upon the smoldering fires on the plain built by Buffalo Bill as a blind.

Taking a dark-lantern Surgeon Powell examined the ground carefully, and at last said:

"Captain Emory, they came this far and retreated by the same trail."

"What does that mean, Powell?"

"With Buffalo Bill as the leader it means to me, Emory, that he saw that he was being pressed too hotly to escape, and with an open plain before him he retreated to shelter he had passed some distance back, doubtless a clump of timber on a stream several miles from here that I recall now."

"I see no camp-fires."

"Very true, and will see none. Just rest your men here while Buttons and I go on to reconnoiter, and send a courier back to hurry Major Melton on, for in my opinion we will need him by daylight."

The courier was at once sent back on the trail, and then Surgeon Powell and Buttons started ahead, and on foot.

It was a couple of hours before they returned, and Captain Emory was asleep on his blanket, his saddle for a pillow, when he was aroused by a touch on the shoulder.

"Ho, doctor, back again?"

"Yes."

"What time is it?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"Any news?"

"Have you had any word from Melton?"

"None, whatever."

"Send another courier after him and tell him to push on if he kills his horses, but halt him half a mile from here."

"You have found the Indians then?"

"Yes, Cody is corralled by them in the timber I spoke of, and is at bay, awaiting their attack at dawn."

"And we are here to beat them off."

"Thank God for it, as they are a thousand strong, perhaps more, and my advice, Emory, is for you to send word to Melton to dispatch one of his couriers back to the fort for more men, and to have Colonel Markham in readiness, for it looks to me as though the Sioux were on an extended raid and in large force."

"You are the doctor, Powell, and I follow your prescription, for you know," and Captain Emory hastily dispatched a courier with

a note to Major Melton, written by aid of the Surgeon Scout's lantern.

The courier gone, Captain Emory asked:

"Now, Powell, what discovery did you make?"

"The Indians are camped in a circle around the timber where Cody is corralled."

"Buttons and I counted the ponies in the line we came to, and at different points we struck, and found enough to show that if the circle was complete they numbered all of a thousand warriors; but whatever their force they will not attack at night."

"And you saw no red-skins?"

"I ran upon one, but he is not dangerous, now," was the significant reply.

"You killed him?"

"Yes, he was asleep, one of the guards over the ponies, and I fell over him, so had to knife him."

"They seemed to have no fear from this direction and to be sure of their prey, and were resting until time to move at dawn."

"I am glad we have a large force, and trust that Melton will soon be up."

"Yes, for we can place the men and the guns, and be ready to attack them before they strike Cody, for their force could never be checked by the few he has to do it with."

"We can open on them with the guns as a starter, and then charge with three troops, keeping the other two as a reserve and support to advance with the battery."

"We must be careful not to fire toward Cody's camp with the guns."

"No, and when Melton comes up I will show them the exact position of Cody's camp and the Sioux lines, so that there will be no mistake made."

"If the major arrives by midnight it will give men and horses several hours' rest, and they will need it, for this has been a long and hard rush from the fort."

"Yes, but no one will care if Cody is rescued, brave fellow that he is," was Captain Emory's reply, and he turned as a courier rode up to report Major Melton coming rapidly on and only a few miles back on the trail.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE BREAK OF DAY.

MAJOR MELTON followed his courier very quickly, coming along ahead of the command and accompanied by his adjutant and an aide.

He was met by Captain Emory and Surgeon Powell, the latter placing the situation before him and suggesting that word be sent back at once to order a slow march for the battery, that no sound of its coming might catch the keen ears of the Indians.

Made acquainted with the situation Major Melton said:

"It is a splendid thing, Doctor Powell, to be both a scout and an officer, and I wish you to serve with me as adviser until the sterner duty of looking after the wounded arises, though I have one of your assistant surgeons along, for Colonel Markham said it was best he should come as long as Buffalo Bill was to be rescued and you were in the lead."

"I am at your service, major, with pleasure; but have you decided upon your plan of action?"

"Oh yes, to carry out your ideas wholly, take position with the battery and three troops as a reserve, and have Captain Emory lead the charge with his two troops after the firing of the guns."

The command was soon up with the advance, and the tired horses were unsaddled for a rest, and the soldiers, also worn out, were glad to get a rest of several hours, well knowing what the coming day would bring to them.

The story had gone the rounds, that Buffalo Bill and his party, wherever they were, had been corralled by a large force of Indians who were waiting for daylight to attack him, and that they were to anticipate the attack in a short while when red work would be the result.

Defying fatigue Surgeon Powell went on another reconnoissance, and Buffalo Bill's scouts had been turned over to his especial command by Major Melton, so they left their horses behind them and went with the doctor to have a look at the field and learn the position of the Indians and the timber where Buffalo Bill was at bay, and fully re-

alizing that all their lives depended upon his gallant friend who had made the ride to the fort for aid.

Yet Buffalo Bill could hardly hope that the Fighting Surgeon had made such a splendid ride of it, or that the troops coming to the rescue had pressed on as they had done.

When Surgeon Powell and his scouts discovered that the Indians were resting, with no dread of other foes near than those they intended to overwhelm at dawn, they returned to the command and found the officers too anxious to rest, all gathered at Captain Emory's camp talking over the situation.

Hearing the surgeon's report the major ordered the scouts to go the rounds and awaken the men so that they could saddle their horses and be ready to move as in another hour it would be dawn.

Blankets had been wrapped around the wheels of the cannon and caissons, the guns and swords of the men had been carried in hand so as to give no clanking sound and trace-chains had been muffled.

Then the command moved slowly toward the point of attack, Surgeon Powell acting as chief guide.

When as near the Indian line as they dared go a halt was ordered, and the Surgeon Scout, who had gone on ahead on foot returned quickly and reported:

"They are on the move, major."

"You see the dark spot against the horizon that shows the timber, so have the guns trained to the right and left several hundred yards, and if you do not hit the red-skins, you will at least stampede their horses."

"All right, Powell. Tell Emory I shall fire within five minutes," and Surgeon Powell walked away to join Captain Emory and deliver the message.

It was just five minutes after that Surgeon Powell was seated upon his horse at the head of the two dozen scouts who had accompanied the soldiers from the fort, while upon one side was Captain Emory and his troop and upon the other Lieutenant Felix Armstrong and his company, all waiting for the firing of the cannon as the signal to charge.

The four guns had been trained as Powell had suggested, two upon one side of the timber, two upon the other, and as the darkness began to grow gray, suddenly the deep voice of Major Andrew Melton rung out with the command:

"At the guns there!"

"Fire!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BIG BALL-RAIN.

It was with considerable foreboding that Buffalo Bill saw the two columns of mounted warriors filing out of the hills on either side to surround him in his position, and a thought came to him which caused him to suddenly ask Sioux Slayer, the young chief, if he had a brave in his band who spoke the Sioux tongue well.

The answer was that one of his young braves, Scalp Taker, had been captured by the Sioux when he was a youth and had spent three years in their village.

Then he had made his escape while out on a hunt with four young Sioux and he had taken the scalps of the four with him and brought them to his own people, thus winning his name.

"He is the brave I wish, and I'll tell you what he must do."

"When the Sioux surround our camp tonight he must slip out in some way, capture one of their best ponies, and ride hard for the Pawnee village."

"He must tell the great chief, Knife Killer, that we are in a close place, and yet are expecting soldiers from the fort to rescue us."

"If they come, the Sioux will retreat by the Hermit's Canyon, so that if the Knife Killer will rush a band of several hundred of his braves there, they will be in time to ambush the retreating Sioux, and when we are rescued, I will lead the Sioux Slayer and his Red Ropers by a secret pass through the range and join the band that the Knife Killer sends."

"Does the Sioux Slayer hear?"

It was evident that the Sioux Slayer not only heard, but was delighted at the plan of the scout, and he at once called up Scalp

Taker, and he was asked if he could get through the Sioux lines.

Scalp Taker was more than pleased at a chance to distinguish himself, and having made a few changes in his appearance, when it was perfectly dark he slipped out of the timber and disappeared.

Buffalo Bill felt relieved when he had dispatched the courier to Knife Killer's village, for he was anxious that the Pawnees should have a hand in the defeat of the Sioux, for he confidently looked for relief from the fort, and that their foes would be forced to retreat.

Too anxious to sleep himself, he bade the others rest while he watched, and hearing no shout of triumph, indicating the capture of Scalp Taker, he felt sure that the young brave had gotten through the lines in safety.

If he found a good horse he ought to reach the Pawnee village before dawn, and a cross trail from there would enable the band of braves sent by Knife Killer to be in position by sunset at Hermit Pass, did they push their horses hard, and the Sioux in retreating would hardly reach there until several hours later, while he did not doubt but that there they would make a stand to beat back the pursuing soldiers.

It would therefore be a surprise to them to find Pawnees already ambushed there, and caught between two fires their losses would be heavy.

At last the scout knew that dawn was not far off and he went the rounds, awaking the braves and the captives for the work of beating off the attack.

He found Singing Dove awake and she coolly said that she was ready for the fight whenever the Sioux charged them.

Buffalo Bill had not heard a sound to indicate that the soldiers had arrived, and the stamping of the Indian ponies and an occasional neigh had alone reached his ears.

At last he saw the gray light of dawn appearing, and said sternly:

"We may expect them now, so stand ready to fight and die!"

His well trained eyes had seen the dark mass of Indians closing in upon the timber on foot, while following them were their ponies led by the braves who had them in charge.

But hardly had the words left the scout's lips when there was heard the deep voice of the major far out upon the plain, and following his command came the quick flashes of the guns.

There were four red bursts of flame, deafening reports, the shrieking of the shells and then the bursting of them directly in the Indian ranks.

The echoes of the guns had not died away when loud cheers were heard, a bugle sounded a charge and then came the thunder of iron hoofs in the wild rush as the gallant troopers bore down upon the Indians, a revolver in one hand a saber in the other.

The Sioux were completely surprised, and they stood in panic-stricken horror for some seconds, hardly realizing that their intended charge upon a few foes had all been changed in an instant and they were now to fight for their lives.

With the breaking of day the gunners could see how to aim now, and shells were thrown thick and fast among Sioux braves and ponies, who fell dead and wounded under the hot fire, while Captain Emory and his men and Surgeon Powell and the scouts were upon them with merciless fury.

Then, too, from the timber came a hot fire from Buffalo Bill and the Pawnees, and so cut up and confused were the Sioux that only their large numbers saved them from a complete stampede.

As it was, their head chief rallied them for a fighting retreat back to the range the way they had come, and as they rode off they beheld the rescue of Buffalo Bill and the party in the timber with him, all of whom they had regarded as surely their prey.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE AND A SURPRISED OFFICER.

IN the surging of the hundreds of Sioux, mounted and afoot, the stampeding of many of their ponies, the firing from the timber, the roar of the guns and bursting of the

shells, added to the charging of the troopers and scouts, and the wild yells of all, it seemed as though a Dante's Inferno reigned supreme for half an hour.

Then, when day dawned fully it revealed a field strewn with dead and dying braves and ponies, while here and there a soldier and a military caparisoned horse dotted the scene.

The Sioux were retreating sullenly to the protection of the hills, while the troopers and scouts were pressing them hard.

Passing near the timber Surgeon Powell and the scouts had made no halt, but they were surprised not to see Buffalo Bill dash out and join them.

Later Major Melton came up with the guns and reserve troopers, determined to camp upon the stream near the timber. He at once rode into the besieged camp and called out:

"Ho, Cody, where are you?"

He beheld there several women and children, a dead white man, but no scout appeared at his summons.

"Pardon me, but where is Scout Cody?" he asked, looking about him.

It was Singing Dove who stepped forward and replied:

"He dashed out with the Pawnee band when the last of the Sioux passed, and is in pursuit of them, sir, and he asked me to say to the commanding officer that he had sent word to Chief Knife Killer to send several hundred of his young braves to Hermit Pass, and to press the retreat hard and he would be there to head them off and deal a severe blow that would send all of the bands now on the war-path back to defend their village."

The words were delivered in a decided, distinct tone, and Major Melton gazed upon the beautiful girl with admiration while he asked:

"Are you one of the captives rescued from the Pawnee village?"

"I am, sir; I am Singing Dove."

"Well, Miss Singing Dove, how is it that Cody has rescued you and others from chief Knife Killer's village, and yet has Pawnee braves as his allies?"

"That, sir, Scout Cody will explain, for he did not request me to do so."

"And he expects to go to Hermit's Pass to join the Pawnees, and ambush the retreating Sioux?"

"So he said, sir."

"How many Pawnees were with him?"

"Sioux Slayer and many young braves; but hundreds will meet him at the pass."

"And I must push the Sioux that far?"

"So he said, sir."

"And there are other bands than these, upon the war-path?"

"Scout Cody so said, sir."

"And the Pawnees have suddenly become his friends?"

"They have, sir—good friends!"

"This is remarkable; but Cody knows what he is about, and I will push the Sioux hard as I can, leaving a small force here with you rescued people, and to let the reinforcements that will come on know where we have gone and why."

"I will see you later, miss," and raising his hat Major Melton rode on and ordered the commander of the battery to shell the hills, hotly advancing as they did so, that the Indians would not halt there to fight them.

This was done, and the cavalry pressing on hotly, large force though the Sioux had, they did not yet dare halt and fight their pursuers.

Finding that the soldiers seemed determined to press the pursuit hard, the Sioux chief suddenly decided to lead them into a trap and urge them to follow as far as Hermit Pass, the very spot for a splendid ambush that must wipe out the whole of the band of pale-faces who were on their trail.

There were other bands of Sioux out upon the war-path, and to these couriers were sent by the cunning chief, ordering them to fall in behind the soldiers, so as to cut them off when they should retreat after being led into an ambush at Hermit's Pass.

The Sioux then sullenly kept on in their flight, enraged that they could not have brought off their killed and wounded and had thus far not a scalp to show, and only defeat to meditate upon.

As Surgeon Powell pressed on in the gloom of early morning, he came to where a trail led off from the main one, after reaching the hills.

It was a small trail, comparatively, of not more than twenty ponies, and among them was a large iron-shod track which caused the Fighting Surgeon to exclaim:

"Cody's horse made that track, a hundred to one on it; but does it mean that the retreating Sioux rushed through the timber and captured Buffalo Bill and his party after all?"

This question, which the scouts could not answer, cast a gloom at once over all.

CHAPTER XX.

CAUGHT IN THEIR OWN NET.

WHEN the Sioux reached the hills, full of rage and hatred, they decided to make a determined stand against the soldiers, who, out upon the plain they could distinctly see were but one-third of their number.

But recalling the pursuit, Captain Emory's men and the scouts under Surgeon Powell, Major Melton at once planted his four guns and began to shell the range.

For awhile the Indians stood it, but as the range was gotten and the shells began to burst in their midst, and their ponies were frantic with fright the red-skins began a hasty retreat, and as they moved out the scouts and Captain Emory's men pushed rapidly into the hills and opened fire with their rifles and carbines.

Establishing a camp in the timbers, with one gun and a crippled caisson, and a score of able-bodied soldiers to look after the wounded and white captives, Major Melton pushed on in chase of the Sioux.

When they saw that they were being hotly pressed they began their cunning work to get revenge, and laid their plans to entrap and destroy the soldiers.

They had sent couriers to the other bands on the war-path, with orders to center at Hermit's Pass, and approach it so as to leave no trail that the soldiers would fall upon.

With a large force there, those retreating before the soldiers intended to lead them right on into the pass and to their doom.

When night came on the Sioux were still sullenly retreating before Major Melton, who, when they would halt in a position as though to make a stand, would begin to shell them and quickly they would be driven on once more.

The couriers sent to the other bands found them readily, and word came back to the head Sioux chief that other braves, equalling his own force in number, would be at the Hermit's Pass in time to aid in the destruction of the hated pale-faces.

But Major Melton advanced slowly, and couriers overtaking him brought news that three hundred mounted infantry and two more guns, with ample supplies were coming quickly on his trail to his support from the fort.

Sending back word to halt one company of infantry and the supply train at the timber as a reserve, and push on with the balance of the force after him, Major Melton felt that he was strong enough to cope with all the Indians he might have to fight, especially if Buffalo Bill kept his promise to meet him at Hermit Pass with a band of Pawnees, though just how the chief of scouts was going to get control of a band of warriors who were a short while before his deadly foes was a mystery not one of the officers of the command could fathom.

It was the afternoon of the next day after the fight at the timber, that the Sioux were within easy distance of the Hermit Pass, and Major Melton not a mile behind them.

The range ran boldly before them, and the canyon that cut it in twain, known as Hermit's Pass, could be seen by the soldiers distinctly.

All looked serene on the range, and the retreating Sioux began to feel happy over the thought that they would soon lead their foes to death, for they had no doubt but that their comrades, the several bands ordered to assemble there and go into ambush, were on hand and awaiting them.

"Are Cody and his Pawnees there?" was the question asked by officers and men.

Surgeon Powell was anxious, yet his face did not reveal the fact.

They had come to rescue the scout, and yet though they had saved the party from destruction Buffalo Bill, for reasons known only to himself, had chosen to escape rescue and had gone off with the small band of Red Ropers to place himself in the power of still other Pawnees.

The secret of Buffalo Bill's alliance with the Pawnees Surgeon Powell could not fathom or understand; but he would patiently await the result.

Nearer and nearer drew the Sioux to the pass, and the soldiers kept close on their trail.

But, suddenly, while the red-skins were yet a mile from the range there was heard a loud volley of rifles up in the pass, followed by the wild war-cries of the Pawnees, and answered by the cries of the Sioux evidently taken by surprise.

What did it mean?

What could it mean?

The retreating Sioux had come to a halt on the trail, for they were evidently wholly surprised and astonished at what they heard.

Into their midst a few shells were thrown, at that moment, which set them in motion again toward the pass from whence came now wilder yells and the rattle of rifles, showing that a battle was being fought there.

"What does it mean?" asked Major Melton in surprise.

"It means, sir, that Cody and his Pawnees are there, attacking the Sioux sent there to ambush us; and see! Yonder come reinforcements for you, Major Melton, so right here must be fought a battle that the Sioux will never forget—the battle of Hermit's Pass!"

Surgeon Powell pointed back over the trail, to where, several miles away, there were coming into view the mounted infantry and two more guns hastening to join in the fight.

CHAPTER XXI.

DOOM DRIVEN.

THE Sioux, in spite of their numbers, hesitated as to what to do.

They were in a trap, where they had intended to entrap their foes.

Their mortal enemies, the Pawnees, as they knew by their war-cries, were at the pass, and to attack their several bands, must be in large force.

On their trail came a very dangerous foe, the pale-faces with their "wheel guns," and, could they have turned upon them and beaten down their horsemen, not far off they beheld a force equally as large coming on, and their vision revealed that they too carried wheel guns.

In their despair they were almost ready to stampede, but their chief had a cool head and he quickly ordered them on.

The intention of the chief was to rush on to the pass, aid their bands there in overwhelming the Pawnees and then, united, to turn and stand at bay to beat back the pale-faces.

The stand must be made there at the pass, for once the soldiers broke through it and stampeded them, the trail to their village was not such a long one, and there might be more soldiers following those they saw.

When they had left their village in half a dozen strong bands, with the double intention of surprising the Pawnees and the fort, they had suddenly found the soldiers in the field against them, and now they appeared to have their old enemies the Pawnees, as their allies against them.

Still more had the retreating Sioux to regret, and that was the fact of their being cut off from their village, for, unless they could get through the pass, they would have to retreat along the base of the range for many miles before another opening could be found to go through, and should the soldiers make a dash direct to their stronghold, they could reach it ahead of them, and find but few warriors there to offer defense.

So the Sioux made a desperate dash for the pass, to rush through it and over the Pawnees, and their intention was at once seen by Surgeon Powell and explained to Major Melton, who sent a courier back to hasten on the reinforcements, and ordered the artillery to fire hotly into the Sioux

ranks as soon as they could dash on to a position ahead.

As the shells began to burst in their midst, the Sioux were almost driven to desperation, but still rode on toward the fight raging in the pass.

But, ere they reached it the wild yells of triumphant Pawnees arose above the roar of the guns, and then came pouring out from the base of the mountain half a thousand horsemen, and many warriors on foot, driven into a hasty flight by the Pawnees who victoriously held Hermit's Pass.

"See, Major Cody and his Pawnees have won, for that is pale-face generalship, not red-skin tactics that has planned that blow and victory."

"Now press on and you can drive the Sioux to doom," cried Surgeon Powell, and gaining permission from Major Melton, he moved on with the scout company, followed by Captain Emory and his two troops, while the rest of the command deployed to hem the Sioux in by a crescent of fire, which would be strengthened by the reinforcements then hastening on.

"If Cody and his Pawnees—if it is Cody—can only hold the pass, we can, as Powell says, drive the Sioux now to their doom," said Major Melton to the officers about him.

"Cody is there, sir," excitedly cried a young officer who had been long gazing intently through a field-glass at the pass.

"Do you see him, Egbert?" asked half a dozen in chorus.

"Yes, I saw him ride out of the pass, and there are hundreds of Pawnee horsemen about him."

"Cody is mounted on a white horse and is placing his braves to resist the Sioux, while others are pressing those who have just been driven out of the pass."

Every eye was now at a field-glass and turned upon the struggling red horsemen at the pass.

Then came at once cry after cry:

"I see him!"

"Yes, it is Cody!"

"Buffalo Bill is there!"

"Bravo for Buffalo Bill!"

"Now the Sioux are downed!" and as the news spread down the line the cry was taken up all along:

"Buffalo Bill holds the pass!"

Then cheer after cheer went up from the soldiers, and back to the major came a courier to report:

"Surgeon Powell says that Buffalo Bill holds the pass, sir, with a large band of Pawnees, so that you can drive the Sioux hard upon him."

"And we will," said the major, sternly, and the troopers were ordered to charge, while the other two guns having come up, unlimbered and went into action, while the mounted infantry formed in line for a steady advance in crescent shape upon the range.

Encouraged by the coming of their comrades, the Sioux driven from the pass turned about and the whole mass with wild yells and firing rifles and arrows, made a desperate rush to break through the pass.

But they were met there by a force of Pawnees under their white leader whom they could not drive from their posts.

It is true they hurled them back into the narrow pass, and the soldiers behind the line was broken, but Surgeon Powell called out:

"See, it was a ruse, Cody's trap, for there they come back again."

It was true, the Sioux had recoiled from some unlooked-for danger they came upon in the pass, and wheeling to the right in solid force they began their retreat along the base of the mountain, leaving their dead and wounded behind them, and followed by the bursting shells of the guns, and the charging Boys in Blue.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HERO OF THE PASS.

It was a grand victory for the soldiers, a terrible defeat for the Sioux.

As the latter started in rapid retreat, there filed out of the pass half a thousand Pawnee braves, well mounted and armed, and they began to press their flying foes hard, while Buffalo Bill, mounted upon a splendid

white horse, his snowy hide stained with several slight arrow wounds, rode at a gallop to the spot where Major Melton had halted and was establishing a temporary camp.

"Ah, Cody, I welcome you gladly," for you are the hero of the pass, the man who won the fight," cried the major, grasping the hand of the scout, who modestly replied:

"Thanks, major, but I had about five hundred fighting Pawnee braves to help me hold the Sioux in check, while you gave them a terrible whipping—why, one shell killed five of them, and their loss is great in warriors and ponies, and they'll never forget this lesson."

"But have you turned Pawnee, Cody, for you are fighting with red-skins now, making it a case of dog eat dog?"

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"No, major, I have not turned red-skin, but I am glad to say by a lucky ten-strike of mine I got the Pawnees as our allies."

"The story is too long to tell now, but the Pawnees are our red brothers, and as your men must be dead beat from their hard work and the horses, too, may I suggest that you recall them from the pursuit as the Pawnees will push the Sioux until they cross the range."

"I'll do it, for my men and horses are used up; but who would not be to gain such a victory?"

The order was given to recall the pursuit, and then Major Melton asked:

"But how did you hold that pass, Cody?"

"I sent to the Pawnee village, sir, as I felt confident that the Sioux would retreat by this pass, and asked chief Knife Killer for a couple of hundred braves."

"He sent me five hundred braves, and it was well that he did, for the Sioux had other bands there; but we were first on the field, and came by the trail on the summit of the ridge, for I met the Pawnees twenty miles from here."

"We lay in ambush, sending our horses around by the slope, and so were hidden on the ridge while the Sioux bands coming up went into ambush in the pass."

"When I saw you coming and driving the Sioux before you, I decided to attack those in the pass before they were joined by their comrades, and the first they knew of our being upon the ridge was a shower of rocks, arrows and bullets."

"Of course we stampeded them, and driving them out of the ridge, we brought our horses up and kept up the fight, falling back when they made their grand charge."

"But I had left plenty of Pawnees on the cliffs, with rock ammunition in abundance, and retreating before them we led them into the trap and they did not face the music long before they fled, and again we charged them."

"With you hemming them in, sir, you won the battle very quickly."

"You are the hero, Cody, as I said, and such shall be my report; but what red-skins are those approaching now?"

"Those are my Red Ropers, sir, the band of the young chief Sioux Slayer."

"They throw a lariat as well as a Texan cowboy, ride like Comanches, and the band are fifty strong, less than I lost to-day and they go back to the fort with me to enter the service of the Government, if it will accept them, as Pawnee scouts, and with them and my own scouts, Colonel Markham need have no more dread of the Sioux surprising the fort and settlements."

"And will they now ally themselves with the hated pale-faces?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"What necromancy have you been guilty of to win them over, Cody?"

"The love of Sioux scalps has done it, sir, for see, they are well supplied," and as the Pawnee horsemen halted near the camp Buffalo Bill pointed to the gory trophies that hung at their belts.

"I must hear the story of it all some time, Cody; but now present your *aide-de-camp*, Sioux Slayer, I believe you call him," and Buffalo Bill called to the young chief to approach.

He did so with quiet dignity, and Buffalo Bill said:

"I wish my Pawnee brother, the chief, Sioux Slayer, to know the white chief of the pale-pace warriors, for he is his friend."

"Yes, my gallant Pawnee Captain, I am glad to know you, for you have done great service to day, and from the looks of your string of scalps you doubtless deserve your name of Sioux Slayer," and the major offered his hand, at the same time taking his revolver from his belt and giving it to the young chief, to whom Buffalo Bill interpreted his words.

Sioux Slayer was delighted at the praise, and also the name given him by the major, and told the scout to say that he would take it, and be known as Pawnee Captain the Sioux Slayer.

"He also thanked the major for the revolver, and his warriors were called up and each one grasped the hand of the white chief, other officers pressing forward and greeting them, and in many cases bestowing presents upon them, an act that was particularly appreciated by the Red Ropers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUFFALO BILL HONORED.

THE worn out soldiers and horses were glad to go into camp for a rest; but the duty they had come upon had been more than accomplished, for Buffalo Bill and those with him had been rescued, and the Sioux had met with a crushing defeat, so the officers and men were jubilant.

There was also cause for gloom, as two of the officers who so bravely came forth to battle with the red-men, and a score of the men had been killed, with quite a number more wounded.

But the Sioux had lost most heavily, and a couple of hundred good ponies had been taken from them.

When all the reports came in, Major Melton heard with regret that Private Frank Fenton had certainly been captured, as he was not found among the dead or wounded, and nowhere could be seen.

His immediate comrades remembered that he had said that he would capture a splendid horse ridden by a chief, and get the war-bonnet of the Sioux as well, and he had dashed off alone, and since then had not been seen.

Two other soldiers, late enlistments in the army, were also missing, and could not be found among the dead or wounded.

They had been seen last with Frank Fenton, and they were also set down as having been captured, though in their case there was not such regret expressed as for Frank Fenton, as neither of them were very good soldiers, and were unpopular with their comrades.

When Buffalo Bill heard of the supposed capture of the men he seemed deeply worried over the fate of Frank Fenton, a youth whom he had taken a great fancy to:

Fenton had enlisted a year before, and from the first was found to be a perfect soldier.

He could drill a troop as well as a captain, and explained this by saying he had been at a military academy before he came West and went to cattle-raising.

The Indians had raided his ranch, and losing all he possessed he had enlisted in the army.

On a score of different occasions he had greatly distinguished himself, and yet had declined the offer of a corporal's stripes and afterward of a sergeant's.

In this last expedition he had saved the life of an officer, then the lives of several of the men at the risk of his own, and in a gallant dash had killed a chief and two warriors in a hand-to-hand conflict, striking two of them down with his saber and shooting the other with his revolver, winning a cheer from the whole troop and compliments from Oscar Emory his captain.

That he had been well educated all who came in contact with him knew, and, a tall, splendidly formed man, with a handsome, striking face, he was a beau-ideal soldier, so that universal regret was felt at his unknown fate, and Buffalo Bill said:

"It will go hard with him if he is a prisoner to the Sioux, and I would like to take my scouts and the Pawnees, Major Melton, and see if I can recapture him and the other two men."

"No, Cody, you have caused anxiety enough of late without allowing you to

escape again, and I am determined that Colonel Markham shall see that we caught you, rescued you or run you down, whatever was the way of our getting you, and so I shall send you with an open letter to the fort reporting the battle, and allowing you to give full particulars of the affair."

Buffalo Bill's face flushed at this, for he knew that he had been selected as the one to carry the news to the fort as a mark of distinguished honor, especially as he was to tell the story himself.

So he raised his broad sombrero and said with feeling:

"I thank you, Major Melton, for the honor you bestow upon me, sir; but I could pick out many officers and men who deserve the compliment surely."

"I shall not deny that, Cody, in the face of all that I saw; but I have decided that you shall go, so if you are not too much fatigued you can start within the hour, and I will have the letter ready for you."

"May I take Sioux Slayer, and his Red Ropers with me, sir, as I wished the colonel to meet them and know that they are our allies?"

"Take them with you, Cody, by all means—only be sure and show yourself in approaching the fort, so as not to get a shell sent into your midst, for all are on the alert there now for red-skins."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied that he would be careful to show himself, or a flag of truce, and the major asked:

"Now about the Pawnees when they return from their scalp-chase?"

"Surgeon Powell will meet them, and he speaks Pawnee well, and it would be well if they returned with you to the fort, for it would have a good effect, and camping there a few days would show them that we are their friends, not their foes, when they bury the tomahawk."

"You are right, Cody, so bequeath your red allies to Powell in your absence," answered the major.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SINGING DOVE WRITES A LETTER.

BUFFALO BILL started upon his ride to the fort accompanied by Chief Sioux Slayer and his band of braves, all seemingly much pleased to be able to escort the great scout to the stronghold of the pale-face warriors, and which they had so often longed to enter, scaling-knife in hand.

Buffalo Bill rode his splendid white horse, a present to him from Knife Killer, for the animal was but slightly wounded, and he set off after an early supper, intending to go some distance before camping, and, by an early start to reach the timber where the reserve was camped by breakfast the next morning.

It was late at night when he camped, and with but one brave on guard he and the others were soon fast asleep.

But they were up before dawn and they rode into the timber just about breakfast time.

The officer in charge had seen them coming and gotten ready to meet hostiles, but one of the captives had recognized the Pawnees as the band of Red Ropers and the scout was then seen in their midst.

"Well, Cody, what news from the front?" called out Captain Grayson, the commanding officer, as Buffalo Bill rode up.

"A perfect victory, sir, for Major Melton, ending in a stampede of the Sioux, and very heavy losses for them, though we suffered also."

"I am just carrying the news to Colonel Markham, sir."

"With those Pawnees accompanying you, I hardly knew whether you had captured the whole outfit, or was their prisoner, Cody."

"No, sir, they are my Pawnee scouts and they did splendid work in the fight; but I must ask your hospitality, Captain Grayson, for breakfast for them, and supplies to go on our way to the fort."

"Certainly, they shall be filled to the muzzle, while you breakfast with me and tell me the story of the fight, and I'll order the supplies gotten ready for you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Then, too, I have here a letter for you, Cody."

"A letter for me, sir—from the fort?"

"Oh, no, from a decidedly pretty girl, your captive who was known as Singing Dove."

"Why should she write me, sir, and through you?"

"She has gone, you know?"

"The girl has gone, sir?"

"She certainly has."

"But how and where, Captain Grayson?"

"Night before last she took French leave, and left this note for you fastened upon the tree where she had spread her blanket."

"This is remarkable."

"Yes, and I could find no reason for her going, and questioned every one about it; but she had quietly slipped away, taking her own horse, which they say was a fine one, her father's rifle, and some provisions sent in to the camp for the captives."

"I will get the letter for you."

The captain went to his camping-place with Buffalo Bill, and from his case took a letter and handed it to the scout remarking:

"It is official, you see."

"Yes, sir, she doubtless got the envelope from some one?"

"Yes, from the adjutant, and she writes a beautiful hand, you see."

The letter was addressed in a fine feminine hand to

"W. F. CODY—BUFFALO BILL,

"Chief of Scouts."

It was marked "Personal," and upon it was written:

"The finder will give to the commanding officer for delivery."

Buffalo Bill broke open the envelope and read as follows:

"DEAR MR. CODY:—

"Do not consider it ingratitude in me, after your kindness in rescuing my father and myself from captivity among the Pawnees, that I refuse to accept my freedom, gained at such a great risk by you."

"I told you that I was half Indian, so long have I been a captive, and now that my poor father lies in his grave, I would have no one to care for me among the pale-faces, my own race, for I know of no kindred or friends that I could call on, and I will not be a burden to any one."

"Though growing up among the wild Indians, my father did not neglect my education and he taught me much of the great world, which now I shun when it is in my power to enter it, returning to my life among the Pawnees as Singing Dove the daughter of the white medicine-chief, and where I will be respected at least, and accept all that fate may have in store for me."

"I dread to go among my own race, a penniless girl, friendless and unused to the ways of those I would have to live with, and it is better for me to return to my wild life."

"So forgive me, Mr. Cody, accept my sincere gratitude of all that you have done for me and let me live and die as an Indian girl, but your friend,

"SINGING DOVE,

once known as

"PEARL FAIRFAX."

"I have, for my protection and use taken the supplies sent to the captain's camp, your revolvers loaned to the two white men, and my father's rifle."

"The horse and saddle you know are mine, and to avoid detention I steal away like a thief in the night, or perhaps to put it more correctly, like an Indian."

Buffalo Bill had read the letter aloud, and when he concluded it Captain Grayson asked:

"Well, what do you think of that, Cody?"

"I think, sir, that the girl must be rescued from herself, she must be taken from the life she leads in an Indian camp."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RETURN OF THE SCOUT.

AT Fort Ready there was a great feeling of uneasiness, when the party under Major Melton started upon the trail of rescue.

Fort Ready had a goodly number of soldiers to garrison it, and needed them, but to draw a considerable force away on a long

trail could not but cause anxiety among those who knew the situation, and the cunning nature of the Sioux, who might make a feint in one direction and pounce down with a large number of warriors upon the fort.

When the courier arrived from Major Melton, asking for reinforcements, and reporting that the Sioux were in large numbers in their front, Colonel Markham at once dispatched ten companies of the infantry mounted and a couple of light guns, reducing his garrison to one-half its original number.

But those that were left were put on double duty, the scouts were kept constantly out on the watch for any signs of the Indians, and had the Sioux really intended an attack on the fort they would have found a warm reception awaiting them.

As no other word came from the front there was considerable anxiety felt as to the fate of Buffalo Bill and those with him, as also for the troops sent to the front under Major Melton, for it was well known that the Sioux could place a very heavy force of mounted warriors in the field, and they were cunning and desperate fighters as well.

"A party of horsemen approaching the fort, sir," said an officer entering the headquarters of Colonel Markham the second day after the fight at Hermit Pass.

"Do you make out who they are, Lieutenant Loyd?"

"Not yet, sir, but word is to be sent at once, sir, when they are known."

Word soon came that it was a party of mounted Indians approaching, and as they were reported as not half a hundred in number, general surprise was felt as to why they were coming.

But a call to posts was ordered, in case they should be the advance guard of a much larger force and were plotting a ruse to cover up an attack.

Then word came that there was a white man discovered in their midst, and in a short while a wild cheer was heard at the stockade and Lieutenant Loyd came up at a double quick to report that Buffalo Bill was coming and those with him were Pawnees.

The cheering grew louder and louder as the scout and his Pawnee guard reached the fort, and riding in amid shouts of welcome he doffed his sombrero and bowed again and again as he rode on to headquarters, the Indians following him in single file.

Arriving at headquarters Buffalo Bill leaped from his saddle, an orderly took his horse and advancing quickly the scout met Colonel Markham who said earnestly:

"Welcome back, Cody, for we all considered you as lost to us; but how is it you come with a red-skin escort and not your scouts?"

"They are Pawnee scouts, colonel, and our allies now, for Knife Killer and his people have buried the tomahawk with their white brothers."

"This is good news, indeed, Cody; but they have ridden far so I will send them to quarters and have them well cared for, while you come in and let me hear all that you know of the news at the front."

Buffalo Bill spoke a few words to Sioux Slayer, who dismounted and advanced, followed by his warriors, and Colonel Markham greeted them in a most friendly manner, his words being interpreted by the scout, who also told them that it was the wish of the white chief to have them go to quarters and be well taken care of.

The Pawnees then remounted and filed away, led by a sergeant, while Buffalo Bill entered the private quarters of the colonel and taking the letter of Major Melton from his pocket handed it to his commander with the remark:

"I was honored, sir, by Major Melton's sending this letter by me, and requesting that I personally inform you of all that has taken place."

"Such a mission from Melton, Cody, means a special honor to you for services rendered, and I congratulate you indeed, and shall be glad to hear all that you have to say, which I hope is nothing of a disastrous nature to our brave boys in the field."

"On the contrary, sir, let me say that I have the best news to communicate of a grand victory won by Major Melton, and also a story of importance to make known of an alliance

I was able to make with Knife Killer, the great chief of the Pawnees, which makes him and his people our friends."

"Bravo, Cody, for that is of immense value to us; but now to Melton's letter," and the colonel motioned the scout to a seat near him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LETTER.

THE letter sent by Major Melton was unopened and Colonel Markham, taking it from the envelope, hastily glanced over it.

It was as follows:

"CAMP NEAR HERMIT'S PASS,
"March 30th, 18—.

"COLONEL MABREY MARKHAM:—

"SIR:—I have the honor to report to you a complete victory over the Sioux, the particulars of which I request W. F. Cody, Chief of Scouts to make known to you, as to him is really due the one grand triumph.

"I say this without disparaging any one else, but in doing so must not forget to state that much is also due to Surgeon Frank Powell, whose distinguished services I will make known in my official report upon my return, along with special mention of the officers and men I have the honor to command on this expedition.

"Through some secret means, unknown to me, W. F. Cody gained the Pawnees as his allies, and, when freed from the siege he was held in by the Sioux, and which we went to rescue him from, he disappeared most mysteriously, with a word left for me, to reappear at Hermit's Pass with half a thousand braves under his command and there check the retreat of the large force of Sioux we were pursuing, attack the other bands sent there to ambush us, and thereby enable us to gain the victory which was crushing in its effects.

"I regret to report the death of Lieutenants Varney and Dillon, and of seventeen men, while the wounded number about seventy, few, fortunately, seriously injured.

"I shall camp here for needed rest, after one of the most rapid rides with a force of this size ever made, and then return by easy marches to the fort, but if required sooner a courier can readily find us.

"All that you require to know Cody can inform you of, as he is thoroughly posted on my movements from the rescue of himself and party at the timber to which Surgeon Powell so ably and rapidly guided us, and just in time to save them from massacre.

"I have also to report, with sincere regret, that Private Frank Fenton and two others are missing, supposed to have been captured by the Sioux, and would mention the conspicuous bravery of Fenton throughout the expedition.

"With respect,

"I have the honor to be,

"Your obedient servant,

"ANDREW MELTON,
"Com'd'g expedition."

When Colonel Markham had finished reading this letter he held out his hand and said:

"I congratulate you, Cody, upon this well-deserved praise from Major Melton, but it is just what I expected of you, and of Surgeon Powell, too, for somehow you work together with wonderful cleverness and success.

"Poor Varney and Dillon, and the other brave fellows who fell with them, met the fate all soldiers must expect and died with their harness on.

"I hope none of the wounded will die, and I deeply regret this capture of Private Fenton and the two other soldiers, whom Major Melton does not name.

"It would have been better had they been slain, for the Sioux are merciless in their revenge.

"Now I am ready to hear your report of the affair, which from what the major writes must have been a most signal victory."

"It was, sir, as you will understand when I tell you that in rescuing my party at the timber, Major Melton had to face over a thousand warriors.

"They had completely surrounded my position the night before, and were moving

to the attack when surprised by the troops, who had made a most remarkable ride of it, and were guided by Surgeon Powell into position, guns and all, without the Indians suspecting their presence until the cannons opened on them.

"Driving the Sioux to the hills, Major Melton shelled them in retreat toward Hermit's Pass, where they had sent couriers to have other bands go with all speed and ambush the command, following them into the trap.

"Three of these bands reached the pass, almost together, and went into ambush, all told numbering twelve hundred braves, so that with those he was pursuing, Major Melton had to face there over two thousand warriors, outnumbering him about five to one and fighting from a strong position.

"But his guns and charging troopers did most effective work, and as the Sioux could not break through the pass they were hemmed in, suffered heavily and were stampeded along the mountain base."

"You have given a very graphic account, Cody, but from it no one would ever suppose that you were in the battle, and yet Major Melton's letter states distinctly that you were there," said Colonel Markham, smiling at the scout's modest report.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUFFALO BILL EXPLAINS.

THE scout smiled at the way Colonel Markham had complimented him, and replied:

"Oh yes, sir, I was there at the battle, but not with the soldiers, you know."

"Where were you?"

"At the pass, sir."

"Alone?"

"Oh no, sir, I had about five hundred Pawnee braves with me."

"In fact commanded a small Indian army yourself?"

"Yes, sir, and good fighters they were."

"I should judge so, to hold at bay two thousand Sioux with soldiers driving them."

"You see, sir, I had the pass, the advantage of position."

"Yes, but how was it that you had the Pawnees, Cody?"

"Chief Knife Killer loaned them to me, sir, for when I was rescued by Major Melton, I went with the Red skin Ropers who were with me to meet the band of warriors I had sent a courier to the Pawnee village to ask Knife Killer to send me, sir.

"He sent more than I asked for, and placed them under my command, so we pressed on to the pass, for I had Indian scouts out who reported, as I felt sure they must do, that the Sioux were retreating that way to their village, and Major Melton was driving them."

"And at the pass?"

"My Pawnee scouts reported other bands of Sioux coming rapidly to the pass, and I knew that the defeated band had sent for reinforcements to meet them there and ambush the troops."

"But I was first on the field with my Pawnees, we hid our ponies, and took position on the cliffs, and when the Sioux bands came up they went into ambush in the gap at the base of the ridge, so did not know of our presence there until we attacked them, which was when we saw the main force nearly up to the pass and Major Melton pursuing."

"And you defeated those there?"

"We gave them a complete surprise, sir, and rolling rocks down upon them stampeded braves and ponies."

"We also held the pass when the whole force came on and charged us, and caught between the Pawnees in ambush, and the troops pursuing them hard, the Sioux became panic-stricken, and fled along the mountain base."

"The soldiers and their horses were worn out, while the Pawnees and their ponies were comparatively fresh, so I asked Major Melton to recall his men and let our allies continue the pursuit, which he did."

"That, sir, is the story of the fight."

"Yes, and a graphic one, only you have not yet explained how it was, Cody, that you managed to get your army of Pawnees, for when I saw you last they were your bit-

er foes, a tribe one had every reason to fear, and yet they suddenly became our friends.

"Pray explain that, please."

"It is a long story, colonel, dating back to my going upon the scouting trip which caused you to send to look me up."

"All right, Cody, your stories always are interesting, and I shall be glad to listen to all you have to tell."

"Thank you, sir," replied the scout, and then he went on to tell of his going into the Indian country, and the duel he had been the sole witness of between the two great chiefs, Knife Killer, the Pawnee, and Death Dealer the Sioux.

"The cause of this meeting alone, with no warriors present," the scout went on to say, "Knife Killer kept to himself; but each certainly expected to be the victor and win great fame by taking in the scalp, war-bonnet and pony of the leader of the other tribe."

"Had I not been there both would have been killed, sir; but I had a greater regard for the Pawnee than for the Sioux, and you may recall, sir, that some time ago I entered the Pawnee village, to let them know that their foes were about to attack them, as I had seen the Sioux on the trail."

"I was held a prisoner to await the truth of my story, but preferred to escape to put Pawnee gratitude to the test, so did so, and since then they have not been such bitter foes of mine as before."

"Seeing my chance to again help them I saved their chief Knife Killer from death, dressed his wounds as well as I could, and took him on to his village, being overtaken on the trail by a band of Sioux searching for their dead chief."

"To end my story, sir, Knife Killer, made a firm friend, did all in his power for me, and in the pow-wow held made me a chief, at the same time agreeing to bury the tomahawk with the whites."

"Why Cody, you have accomplished wonders."

"Thank you, colonel, but there is more to tell."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SPECIAL MISSION.

CONTINUING his story Buffalo Bill said:

"As I had noticed in the village, Colonel Markham, a number of white captives and two negroes, I told Knife Killer plainly that in making terms with you that you would not consider the matter unless the pale-face prisoners were given up."

"He did not wish to submit to this, especially as one of the captives had become the head medicine-chief of the tribe, and he had with him his young and beautiful daughter, of whom I will speak later."

"But I was firm, so Knife Killer, who was still suffering from his wounds, yielded, and I was allowed to bring the captives with me, nine whites and the two negroes."

"Three of them were women and three children, then there was the medicine-chief I spoke of, two white men and the negro."

"The Knife Killer appointed a young chief, Sioux Slayer as my escort, with his band of young braves, or a part of them, and strange to say they are remarkable lasso-throwers, and I named them my Red-skin Ropers."

"On the way we were met by a band of Sioux and I stood at bay in a splendid spot to defend, and there Doctor Fairfax, for such was his name, was killed, with several of the Red-skin Ropers."

"We were in a desperate situation when suddenly we heard a bugle call, and glancing upon a cliff I first saw a horseman, then an officer on foot, and later came the rattle of a Winchester."

"Frank Powell, by the gods of war!" cried the colonel excitedly.

"Yes, sir, though I supposed a large force of soldiers were coming to the rescue."

"Instead he was alone, but answered the purpose just as well, as he stampeded the Sioux, rescued us, and starting our outfit on the trail for the fort, came for aid as you know, sir."

"Yes and a splendid ride he made of it, Cody," said the colonel, and Buffalo Bill then continued his story of the retreat, his being forced to stand at bay in the timber, after marking a trail beyond to deceive the Sioux,

and the story of his battle there, and again a rescue through the courage and endurance of the Fighting Surgeon.

"When I was rescued, Colonel Markham, I knew that my best plan was to make at once to the mountains and get what Pawnees I could to cut off the retreat of the Sioux."

"The scalps those with me had received I felt sure would encourage Knife Killer to send me the braves I had sent to him for by Scalp Taker, a young brave who had run the gantlet of the lines about us."

"I was not disappointed in my hopes, for, as I have said, Knife Killer sent half a thousand warriors, and they will return with Major Melton, sir, to see you, and thus cement the treaty between them and the pale-faces."

"They shall be most warmly welcomed, Cody, and I will see to it that their leaders at least shall receive presents of prisoners, while gifts will be given to the braves and sent to their old chief, who certainly must be classed as a very able general."

"This treaty of peace with the Pawnees will be worth a great deal to the Government, and save many a brave soldier's life, not to speak of the good it will do for the settlements."

"As for the Sioux we must fight them still, as they will not yield until thoroughly subdued and it will take years to accomplish that."

"You have done well, Cody, and deserve the thanks of Congress for your work; but now about those captives?"

"They will doubtless go to the settlement, sir, and find homes, while the two negroes can get employment, I suppose, as servants here in the fort."

"Very readily; but the daughter of this unfortunate doctor you referred to."

"Yes, sir, unfortunate she is, indeed."

"Her father was a practicing physician East, a man of refinement and education, also of wealth, I gleaned from the little he told me."

"He must have lost his money and came West, settling in the Happy Home Valley, so was one of the victims of the Sioux massacre there some years ago."

"All his family save himself and daughter were slain, and he was ruined and taken captive by the Sioux; he was the next day recaptured by the Pawnees after a hard battle."

"The doctor and his daughter were taken to the Pawnee village, where for her sake he at once allied himself with the Indians, and became a medicine-chief, waiting and hoping to escape some day."

"And was set free only to be killed; but his poor child must be cared for, and she has my deepest sympathy."

"I will see what Mrs. Markham can do for her."

"Colonel Markham, read this letter, please," and Buffalo Bill handed over Singing Dove's letter, and told how she had left the camp under Captain Grayson's command."

The colonel read the letter through slowly, and then said sadly:

"This is unfortunate."

"Can the poor girl have reached the Indian camp again, alone, as she was?"

"I hope so, sir; but it is my desire to at once set out on the trail to find out."

"I would have done so, sir, when Captain Grayson gave me the letter, only I had orders to report to you, sir."

"If I can now go to the village of Knife Killer, carrying him presents from you, and reporting that his braves are coming here to see you, it will do a great deal of good, and I desire to leave to-night, sir."

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRACKING A FAIR FUGITIVE.

THE request of Buffalo Bill Colonel Markham deemed it best to grant.

He did not like to see the scout, after his arduous services of the past few weeks, start out again upon a long trail, but he considered that it was demanded by the circumstances of the case that he should go.

First of all was that the young white girl, Singing Dove, had alone left the camp of Captain Grayson, to go on a long trail alone back to the Indian village.

Her fate must be at once known.

Then, too, the going of the scout to Knife Killer to report the grand victory over the Sioux, and that the Pawnee braves were going to the fort with the pale-face warriors who had fought the fight as their comrades, would be a strong tie to bind more thoroughly the treaty made with Buffalo Bill.

Then, too, the Pawnee braves would tell of their visit to the fort, how the big white chief had treated them and carry back with them numberless presents for their great chief Knife Killer.

When the matter was all talked over, and Mrs. Markham readily said she would give the fair young captive a home with her, for she and the colonel had no children, having lost their only child, a daughter, some years before, it was decided that Buffalo Bill should set off with his Red-skin Ropers after supper that day, and push on to a night camp, ready to make an early start the following morning.

The colonel had a special parade for the Red-skins Ropers to witness, showed them about the fort to impress them with its strength, and, by a clever device allowed them to see the companies twice over, thus giving them the idea that there were twice as many soldiers in the garrison as there really was.

When they came to the time of departure a dozen pack-horses were laden with provisions, blankets and other presents for their people, their chief was sent a fine horse with officer's saddle and bridle from the colonel, and blankets and a sword and revolvers as well.

They filed out of the fort half an hour before sunset, delighted with their visit and greatly impressed by the power of their pale-face friends as they had now become.

At their head rode Buffalo Bill by the side of Chief Sioux Slayer, who had fared most generously in the way of gifts, and as the scout passed out of the stockade a salute was fired in his honor, in recognition of his winning the Pawnees over as friends, and cheer after cheer was given him, causing his handsome face to flush with pride and gratification.

Anxious to get on with all speed, Buffalo Bill did not halt to camp until the fort was twenty miles behind them.

Then a rest was made until before dawn, when they pressed on for a couple of hours when they halted for breakfast, the Red-skin Ropers rejoicing in their having made friends with the pale-faces when they enjoyed the provisions which had been brought along by the scout.

The scout followed the trail they had taken on their way to the fort, as it was his intention to take the trail of the girl Sharp-Shooter just where she had left Captain Grayson's camp.

Then too Buffalo Bill carried dispatches for Major Melton, to be left with Captain Grayson if the command had not yet reached the reserve position.

It was just sunset when they reached Captain Grayson's camp, to find that the major and his command had not yet returned, but a courier had come in stating that they would arrive the next day, and that the Pawnees were returning from the chase of the Sioux having come up with a number of stragglers on foot and wounded warriors who were very quickly and summarily dealt with according to the Indian fashion.

The dispatch also stated that Surgeon Powell had served as the white chief of the Pawnees in their pursuit of the Sioux, and at the request of their own chiefs was to command them until they reached the fort, as he spoke their language well and was known to them as the "Brother" of Buffalo Bill.

Captain Grayson also told the scout that there had been no tidings gleaned of Private Frank Fenton and the two soldiers supposed to have been captured with him.

"I regret poor Fenton's fate, Cody, and only wish it was possible to rescue him in some way."

"He was far above the ordinary, as young men go, and should have held a commission instead of being an enlisted man."

"Somehow I have always thought that he was a man with a history, one who was under a cloud, perhaps."

"I have had the same thought, Captain

Grayson, and with you I wish we could rescue him.

"At the present I am on the trail of that strange young girl, Singing Dove, but when I have seen her, I shall see what can be done toward solving the mystery hanging over Fenton.

"I may be able to get back this far with her before Major Melton moves on to the fort, but should I not do so, I will leave a line to Surgeon Powell asking him to remain here until I return, keeping with him some of my scouts, and we will talk over Fenton's probable fate and see what can be done," and Buffalo Bill sat up talking to Captain Grayson until late before he went to his blankets.

The scouts at the camp, after the flight of Singing Dove, had found the trail where she departed and followed it for a mile or more, so Buffalo Bill knew just where to go and strike it in the morning without taking the time to hunt for it.

It was just break of day therefore the following morning, when the scout picked up the trail of the Singing Dove and, with the Red-skin Ropers pushed rapidly on to track the fugitive girl.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

WHETHER relying upon her skill in frontier craft, or riding at random merely to elude pursuit, Buffalo Bill could not at first decide when following the trail of Singing Dove after her departure from Captain Grayson's camp.

It seemed to indicate uncertainty of purpose, as though not knowing her way, yet trying to keep within a certain radius.

But, after a few miles had been gone over, the trail took a straight course, as though the young girl had gotten her bearings and had gone in the right direction.

When Buffalo Bill noted this he found an explanation for it by muttering to himself:

"It was night when she left camp.

"When the day broke she took her own ideas of the direction of the Pawnee village and she has not missed it very far if she held on as she was going here."

When he explained this to Sioux Slayer he found that the Indians had accounted for the course first wavering, then holding straight on just as he had done.

The tracks showed that the horse had been urged to quite a brisk gait, after the trail took a certain direction, and this seemed to indicate a fear of pursuit and anxiety to get well on her way.

There were too many eagle-eyed trailers along for the trail to be lost for a moment, so the scout followed it as fast as he dared urge the well-laden pack-animals.

An hour's halt was made at noon, and soon after resuming the trail the scout drew rein suddenly.

Sioux Slayer rode quickly to his side and peered down upon the ground as he was doing.

There was another trail visible there and one not made by less than half a hundred ponies.

"Pawnees, maybe?" said the scout laconically.

Sioux Slayer shook his head.

"Maybe Sioux."

"Maybe so."

"Plenty ponies."

"Yes."

"Come from that way," and Buffalo Bill pointed toward the Sioux country.

The chief nodded.

"Follow trail of the Singing Dove."

"Yes."

"What do your braves say?"

The braves as they came up each one examined the new trail carefully and in silence. Buffalo Bill waited for them to speak.

At last they did so, and it was the general opinion that the trail was that of a small band of Sioux that had separated from one of the larger forces and were either on a scout, or were hoping to fall in with some band of Pawnees.

"Follow the trail as before we will," said Buffalo Bill and the Pawnees all nodded.

So the trail was continued on as before, a close watch being kept to see that the horse ridden by Singing Dove was the one that

the others were following, and that it did not branch off from the others.

But now and then the tracks of the girl's horse were seen and the trailers pushed on with more speed, for it looked more and more as though the ones who followed her were Sioux.

Sioux Slayer did not recall that any small band of Pawnees was away from the village on a scout, and the direction from whence the trail had come seemed to prove that they were enemies, not friends.

If Pawnees, the Singing Dove was safe.

If Sioux, she would be taken captive and carried to their village.

Anxious regarding her fate, Buffalo Bill pushed on with as great speed as he dared force the pack-horses.

At last, seeing that they delayed him, he said to Sioux Slayer that he would go on ahead with a few of the braves and leave him to follow more slowly with the others.

But the young chief was not to be cheated out of a fight if there was to be one, and he quickly pointed out to the scout that the trail they followed numbered as many ponies as they had braves along, and if they proved to be Sioux, it would be a hot fight that would follow.

So he suggested that he go along too, leaving only half a dozen braves to come on with the pack-animals.

This being decided upon, the fighting-force pushed on more rapidly, and after an hour's ride were going at a great pace when Buffalo Bill suddenly drew rein.

His quick ear had detected a sound that startled him.

All were at once as still as death, and then distinctly came to their ears the sound of a rifle-shot.

It was a long way off, and there came no answering shot.

Only that shot and the one that had attracted the scout's attention were heard.

It came from off on their right, down a valley and appeared to be a mile or more away.

Instantly Buffalo Bill dismounted, and with Sioux Slayer went on ahead, the braves following far behind.

A mile was gone over, then they halted and peered over a ledge of rock.

What they saw appeared to startle them, for the scout held up his hand for the following braves to halt where they were.

They did so, and removing his sombrero Buffalo Bill unslung his field glass and peered through it for so long a while that any one save an Indian would have grown impatient with suspense.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A GIRL AT BAY.

WHEN Buffalo Bill had looked through his glass until he had seen all that he wished to, regarding the scene before him, he turned to Sioux Slayer who was quietly seated on a rock awaiting for him to speak.

The braves sat like statues on their horses a few hundred yards distant also waiting with calm patience for the order calling them on or sending them back on the trail.

"Let my red brother remove his war-bonnet and take this far-seeing eye of the pale-faces.

"Now let him look over at the cliff in the valley, a mile away.

"Does he see?"

The chief placed the field-glass to his eyes, as the scout showed him how to do, moved it until the focus fell upon what he wished to see, and then suddenly started and quickly removed it from his face.

"They are a mile away, chief.

"It is the far-seeing eye that brings them so near.

"Let the chief look again and tell Pa-e-has-ka what he sees."

Thus reassured, the chief again raised the glass and what he beheld seemed to interest him greatly.

He gazed earnestly through the glass until his eyes became blurred with tears from his steady gaze.

Then he removed the glass and Buffalo Bill asked quietly.

"What does the Sioux Slayer see?"

"Sioux."

"How many?"

The chief indicated half a hundred.

"Where?"

"Around cliff point that rise high over valley."

"Yes."

"Does he see any one on the cliff?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"The Singing Dove."

"And the Sioux?"

"Try to capture her, but she is too high and beat them back with rocks."

"Let the chief look again."

He did so, and while the glass was to his eye there was heard a shot from down in the valley.

Instantly Buffalo Bill clasped his hand over the chief's mouth, for he was about to give a war cry.

"The chief is mad!"

"What did he see?" cried the scout.

Brought to his senses by the act of the scout, preventing his war-cry, Sioux Slayer said quickly:

"Pa-e-has-ka do good.

"No let Sioux Slayer give war-cry when he saw Sioux fall from tree."

"What did you see?" quickly asked the scout, taking the glass.

"Sioux Slayer saw brave climb up the big cliff, and Singing Dove threw rock, but it did not hit him.

"She threw another rock, but it did not kill Sioux.

"Then she fire rifle and Sioux fall from tree, dead.

"Then Sioux Slayer want to give war-cry, but it was bad."

"Yes, it might have prevented our surprising them, for we must attack those Sioux, chief."

This the chief seemed only too anxious to do, and Buffalo Bill reconnoitered the valley and its surroundings carefully through his glass.

He saw that a spur of rocks jutted out from the ridge upon one side, nearly a mile distant, and it arose at the end in a tower-like cliff, rising with precipitous sides to the height of a hundred feet.

Near this cliff, almost against it, grew a massive tree, the branches beginning some thirty feet up from the ground, and spreading out so as to touch the cliff.

The tree was dead, having been killed by a lightning-stroke, and the upper branches spread out over one side of the cliff.

Whether the girl had climbed this tree or not, to escape from the Sioux, Buffalo Bill did not know, but suspected that she had as the Indians sought to reach her by that means, but in each case the daring attempt thus far had ended in the fall of the red-skin, struck down by a rock thrown by the girl, or by a shot from her rifle.

The Sioux were camped about the base of the cliff, and the point being separated from the rest of the spur there seemed to be no way that the Indians could reach the girl.

But Buffalo Bill saw that the Pawnees, by a flank movement, could approach the cliff within a few hundred yards, and then charge out of the timber upon the Sioux, taking them completely by surprise.

As their ponies were staked out some distance from them, and the Sioux would be driven into the open valley the Pawnees would have greatly the advantage.

Noting these circumstances in their favor the scout communicated his intention to the Pawnee chief who at once decided that it was just what should be done.

So back to their horses they went, and leaving the trail, now that they had found the girl, they made a flank movement along the top of the ridge, and at last came to where a descent to the valley could be made by way of a canyon.

Here Buffalo Bill dismounted and went on ahead, the Pawnees slowly following and keeping him in sight.

At last they saw him hold up his hand for them to halt.

What had caused him to halt was that he had come in sight of the tower-like cliff, the girl on the top and the Sioux at the base.

From his point of observation behind a rock Buffalo Bill saw an Indian climbing the tree growing against the cliff; but suddenly he beheld the girl on the summit

throw her rifle to her shoulder, and with the sharp report the warrior fell heavily to the ground fifty feet below.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RED-SKIN ROPERS' TERRIBLE CHARGE.

THE report of the rifle was heard by the Pawnees, but they made no move, silently sitting on their horses, for they saw that their white chief still held his position.

In a little while he motioned them to advance and they did so, riding slowly.

Buffalo Bill was now near enough to take in the whole situation.

The ponies of the Sioux were fully three hundred yards distant from their riders, the latter, almost without exception, save several guards, being grouped about the base of the tower-like rock.

The summit of this rock seemed hardly more than forty feet square, and upon it grew several scrub pines.

The sides of the rock could not be scaled, being precipitous and smooth, and as the Sioux tried to reach the summit by the deadly way of the large, lightning-riven tree, that must have been the way the girl ascended and the only means of getting up there.

Although the girl could have fired down upon her foes, killing any one she chose, or turned loose rocks over upon them, she seemed to have no desire to do so save when they made an attempt to reach her position.

That she had shown she could defend herself was revealed by the fact that several dead warriors lay in a row under the shadow of the cliff.

That the Indians could have killed her seemed also an assured fact; but this they did not make any attempt to do, preferring to capture her alive, it seemed.

The warriors at the base of the cliff were scattered about, occupying considerable space.

Some of them were asleep, others were talking together in groups, a few were idling about but the greater number were striving to find some way of capturing the girl, or looking around for another warrior bold enough to make the effort to climb the tree and seize the girl.

It was not long before a young Sioux brave did step out and offer to take the chances of the climb up the tree.

His companions seemed greatly to admire his pluck, in the face of the death of their comrades, and as they gathered around him when he approached the tree, Buffalo Bill decided that it was the time to make the charge upon them.

So it was that he signaled for the Pawnees to advance, and as they drew near, the chief himself leading his horse, the scout stepped back and joined them.

"I will empty my rifle upon them, chief, and then mounting, will charge with my revolvers in hand, you and your warriors following," he explained.

Sioux Slayer nodded assent, and the next moment the Pawnees saw the scout raise his Winchester to his shoulder, take quick aim, and rapidly the shots rung out and the leaden messengers went tearing into the group of Indians at the base of the cliff.

A few seconds only did it take to empty the rifle, and then, as the chief dashed up with his horse, Buffalo Bill threw himself into the saddle and with a revolver in each hand dashed out of the canyon leading the charge of the Red-skin Ropers.

The Sioux Slayer also had a pair of revolvers, which had been presented to him, and well he knew how to use them, and there rattled forth shots with those of the scouts, while with their terrible war-cries the Red-skin Ropers, whirling their lariats about their heads, followed their leaders, the white and the red chiefs.

The Sioux were taken wholly off their guard, and caught in a trap they had not looked for.

The Winchester had done good work, the revolvers also dropped their deadly hail into their midst, and the Sioux turned in rapid flight for their ponies, a few of them only turning their weapons upon their foes.

But, led by Buffalo Bill the Red-skin Ropers pressed hotly on the track of the flying Sioux, and lasso after lasso was thrown

and caught about the neck, or form of the braves, who were dragged to the ground by their relentless pursuers and either killed or badly injured.

It was a thrilling, yet terrible sight, that charge of the Red-skin Ropers, and Buffalo Bill who had never seen them use their lassoes as weapons before was impressed with its deadly execution in their skillful and merciless hands.

Having cut the Sioux off from their ponies, the Pawnees at once secured the animals while they kept up the chase of the fugitive braves as they ran to cover in the nearest canyon and timber, panic stricken by the charge of the terrible red Lasso-Throwers, and seeking only to find a hiding-place from their relentless pursuers.

What the fate of the remnant of the band would have been can be readily understood, had not darkness fallen upon the valley and checked the hunt for life and scalps.

Having seen that the victory was won, that the Sioux were flying for their lives and their ponies had been captured by the Pawnees, Buffalo Bill wheeled his horse and rode back to the base of the cliff to come suddenly upon Singing Dove, who, recognizing him and the Red-skin Ropers, had quickly descended from her retreat on the rock and calmly gazed on at the scene of carnage going on before her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE REFUSAL.

"You have come after me, Buffalo Bill." So the Singing Dove said when she faced the scout as he rode up, a half-defiant look upon her face.

"I have, Singing Dove," was the reply.

"Why did you come?"

"To take you back with me."

"How did you find me?"

"I took your trail and followed you."

"Why did you not let me do as I wished?"

"Because you have no right to do so."

"You are a white girl, young, beautiful, and have no right to bury yourself in an Indian camp."

"Not if I wish to?"

"No."

"Have you anything to eat with you?"

"Plenty."

"Give me something, for I am almost starved."

Buffalo Bill saw that the face was pale and haggard, the eyes sunken, and he said quickly:

"Poor girl, you have indeed been made to suffer."

"Here is my haversack of food, so help yourself, and we will camp here now for the night, so you will soon have a good, hot supper."

"I must eat something now, I cannot wait," and she eagerly devoured a cracker and a piece of venison steak.

Buffalo Bill saw that the Pawnees were giving up the chase in the twilight, and coming up toward the cliff, and he asked the girl:

"How long have you been here?"

"Since the afternoon of the day following the night I left."

"The Sioux tracked you?"

"Yes, I looked around and saw them coming, so rode on with all speed."

"But my horse was lame and I had to leave him here and hide."

"I saw this cliff and the tree, so I climbed up to the top."

"But they saw me and tried to make me come down, for several of them spoke Pawnee, and English, too."

"When they saw that I would not, they sent a warrior up to capture me, but I killed him before he reached the cliff, for I had taken my rifle up with me, slung to my back."

"You are a brave girl."

"I did not wish to be taken, and I hate the Sioux, for they killed all I love."

"And yet others made the attempt to reach you?"

"Yes, they would not shoot me I soon saw, and risked their lives to take me alive."

"I threw rocks at those who came up next, and knocked one brave off the tree;

but several came together, so I had to use my rifle again, and that checked them."

"I had no food, for it was on my saddle, so I nearly starved, and it was hard to watch them day and night."

"But I did do it, and I know I have killed a number of them, only I did not keep count."

"But I believed I would starve to death before long, and had you not come I could not have lasted much longer, so you saved me, and I thank you, Buffalo Bill, only I am so sorry you wish me to go back with you, for I will not go."

"But you must."

"No."

"Since I saw you there has been a great battle."

"Knife Killer sent me a number of warriors, and they, with the soldiers from the fort, gave the Sioux a terrible defeat at Hermit's Pass."

"I was sent to the fort with the news, and there learned that you had gone when I stopped at the camp, and Captain Grayson gave me your letter."

"I told Colonel Markham of you."

"He is the commandant of the fort, you know, and he has a lovely wife."

"They have no children, having lost a daughter some years ago by being thrown from her horse."

"Had she lived she would have been about your age."

"They were both distressed to read your letter and to know that you had returned to live among the Pawnees again."

"They asked me much about you, and I told them of you, of your sorrows, the death of your father and that you were a splendid little woman."

"So they told me that I must come after you and take you back to them and that their home should be yours, that you should be as their child."

"Now you know why I am here, and you cannot refuse to go back with me."

"But I do refuse, I will not go," was the firm response of the young girl.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE PAWNEE VILLAGE.

THAT Singing Dove was firm in her determination Buffalo Bill felt assured.

He could see also that her pride was the motive that prompted her to decide not to be a care and expense to others, those who were strangers.

She felt her uselessness fully, and feared that she would be an object of curiosity and even dislike to her own race.

Poor child, she did not know that her very misfortunes would open the hearts of kind people toward her everywhere.

In spite of her father's teaching her, of her having been twelve years of age when she became a captive and the memory of her childhood in a happy home, the surroundings she had passed six years in could not but influence her and leave their impress upon her.

As she had said she was "half Indian."

She could ride like one, shoot a bow and arrow and rifle with a skill many a brave had envied, while she could follow a trail and was famous in the village as a huntress.

Her powers of endurance were wonderful, and though she loved the sports of men, her father having been a perfect sportsman, she learned all the work of the Indian girls as well, and many were the pretty costumes she had made for herself.

But her early life had instilled in her a certain pride and knowledge, which had made her feel that she would be a burden upon others.

With her father she would have been only too happy to go into the wide world.

But alone, no, she shrunk from it.

Of course she was sought after by the young chiefs and warriors of the tribe, many of whom loved her; but her father had taken a firm stand there, one he could do as medicine-chief, and stated that she was to be his assistant, claiming certain superstitious powers for her which he knew would protect her and thus she had escaped the persecutions of Indian lovers, for persecution would have been their visits to her.

Buffalo Bill seemed to read the girl perfectly and to appreciate the way she felt, so, when she came out with her flat refusal he urged no more on that subject, but replied:

"Well, Singing Dove, we will not talk more about it now; but I am glad we got here in time to save you from the Sioux."

"Yes, I am very glad."

"They knew of you as the Snow Lily of the Pawnees, and so they sought to capture you alive, feeling that it would give them a great power over their foes."

"You made a brave resistance, and were fortunate in finding a place where you could beat them back."

"And kill them?"

"What would your chief's wife and the five ladies at your fort think of a girl who killed men?"

There was a sneer in the tone mingled with sadness.

"They would think that you were a brave girl to be able to protect yourself, and applaud you for it."

"The mission of soldiers is to fight and kill, to beat back foes, and they would regard you as a heroine indeed."

"No, no, you must not feel that way."

"Well, I did not scalp them, did I?" she said naively.

"No indeed, you left that for the warriors to do."

"But I am going on to the village with you, Singing Dove, to see the chief, for the colonel has sent him some presents."

"Had the ladies known that you would not return, many gifts would they have sent to you."

"Ah! there comes our rear guard with ten pack-horses," and as Buffalo Bill spoke the Indians left to come on more slowly, and after whom a guard had been sent by Sioux Slayer, to show them the camp, came up.

Camp was at once pitched on the bank of a small stream and two and three together the Pawnees came in from their chase after the Sioux.

They were all elated over their victory and Sioux Slayer said to Buffalo Bill:

"The great white chief makes the belts of the Pawnees heavy with Sioux scalps."

"He takes no scalps himself, but he leads us on the war-path against our foes and my braves get plenty—I will call my white brother Ma-ne-ka-ta."*

Buffalo Bill could not show any distaste to the name he was honored with, and so thanked the young chief, who at once departed to make known to his braves that he had christened the great scout of the pale-faces Ma-ne-ka-ta.

Supper was soon prepared, Singing Dove cooking her own and Buffalo Bill's, and then a double guard was placed around the camp and their own and the captured ponies, for it was feared that some Sioux might attempt in the darkness to get a remount and revenge at the same time.

But the night passed without a disturbance, the fugitive Sioux being only too anxious to get as far away under cover of the darkness as they could.

After breakfast the scout had the dead bodies of the Sioux buried and then the trail was taken for the Pawnee village.

It was late in the afternoon when singing their victorious war-song the Red Ropers rode into the Indian village with Buffalo Bill and Singing Dove riding close behind Sioux Slayer, who was in the lead, the braves following them and their hearts filled with pride at their victories and to see the whole tribe turn out to welcome them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

BUFFALO BILL found a warm welcome from his friend, the chief Knife Killer.

The wounds he had received in his desperate duel with the Sioux chief were nearly healed, though he had been a great sufferer and had a close call from death.

He realized fully that not only had Buffalo Bill kept the knife of the mortally wounded Sioux chief from being driven into his heart, but that he would never, but for the kindness of the scout, and his skill in caring for his wounds, been able to leave the timber where the combat was fought.

Then, too, he had seen the scout beat

back the pressing Sioux, and felt that he had, after arriving with him in his village, remained to see that he was out of danger before he had left him.

When he had made the offer for peace between the pale-faces and the Pawnees the Knife Killer had readily agreed.

His tribe was not powerful, as that of the Sioux, he was nearer the pale-face forts and settlements and he had only revenge to gain in a general way in keeping up the fight.

On the other hand Buffalo Bill had once before shown a friendly act in warning his tribe of an intended attack by the Sioux, and he had everything to gain for his people by an alliance with the whites.

So he had readily yielded to the scout's demand that the captives he held must be released, though he had hoped that the white medicine-chief and his daughter would remain willingly.

When Buffalo Bill had sent for a band of braves to come to his rescue, Knife Killer had shown his willingness to aid the whites by sending the large force that he did.

The Scalp Taker, the young Pawnee who had slipped through the Sioux lines and brought the word, had told of the meeting of the large Sioux band and the fight Buffalo Bill made against them, and the rescue by the also greatly feared Fighting Surgeon.

He had told of the surgeon's ride to the fort for help, the camp in the timber to stand at bay, and he had ridden like the wind to the village to ask Knife Killer for his braves.

The day before the arrival of the party in the village a band of braves had returned from the Hermit Pass battle-field with the wounded warriors, save a few who were so severely hurt they had been left in the hands of the surgeon to care for.

They told of the grand victory and their belts were heavy with scalps, while they had with them a couple of hundred ponies captured from the Sioux.

The chief in charge of the band was loud in his praises of the way the great white scout had commanded them, and how the pale-face warriors had fought, while all were awed at the braves of the big wheel guns.

He told how the rest of the band had gone on with the soldiers to meet the big chief at the fort.

Of course there was mourning for the slain, but the grand victory and the trophies taken were a panacea that greatly soothed the red-skin heart.

Under such circumstances, and when he had another triumph to his credit and the rescue of Singing Dove, there was of course a warm welcome for Buffalo Bill from Knife Killer and his braves and also from every squaw and pappoose in the village.

The return of Singing Dove was a glad surprise to the Indians, who had hated to give her up, and Buffalo Bill feared, now that she was again among them and felt as though she had come among kindred, as it were, she would not yield to his pleading to go to the fort.

But to his pleasure and surprise it had the contrary effect, for when she returned to the tepee where she had lived happily with her father and found that he was not there, that her call for him was unanswered, that all about her reminded her of him, and she would, without his presence, his protection find life very different in the Indian camp, she at once made up her mind to act.

Seeking Buffalo Bill, the day after their arrival in the village with tears in her beautiful eyes, she said in a plaintive tone:

"Will you take me back with you, Buffalo Bill, after I refused to go?"

"I cannot stay here, for my poor father is gone, and I am not an Indian, these are not my people and I wish to go to the fort and live among those of my own race."

"I can work hard and pay those who are kind to me, those who care for me."

"Will you take me?"

"Yes indeed, Singing Dove, and we will start back to-morrow, for I have a duty to perform that must not be delayed," was the scout's earnest response.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DUTY TO PERFORM.

IN his desire to rescue Singing Dove from the life she had led in the Pawnee village,

Buffalo Bill had not forgotten others who he felt had an equal claim upon him.

Those were Private Frank Fenton, the dashing young soldier, and the two who had been captured with him the day of the Hermit Pass battle.

The scout had a belief that the Sioux might delay in putting their captives to death for a short while, and thus enable a rescue to be attempted.

He well knew that it was out of the question to think of moving upon the Sioux village, for there were not soldiers enough at the fort, added to the company of settlers and the Pawnees as allies also, to invade the Sioux country with any hope of success.

The Sioux could put over four thousand warriors in the field, not to speak of the old men and boys who could aid in the defense of their village, while the trail there was one that they could have defended against an equal force of soldiers even.

But strategy, Buffalo Bill well knew, would accomplish that often which strength would not, and so he decided to plot some means of escape for the prisoners.

He had been much pleased with the manner in which young Scalp Taker had performed his mission in getting through the Sioux lines and going to the Pawnee village for braves.

The young warrior spoke the Sioux language like one of the tribe, he knew their village, their ways and their country perfectly, and he was anxious to distinguish himself in some signal manner.

So Buffalo Bill determined to give him a chance to do so, and accordingly took him aside and had a long talk with him.

He told him of his desire to rescue Private Fenton and his comrades, and that he believed that it could be done with his aid and that of the Surgeon Scout.

The Scalp Taker could go with them into the Indian country, on foot if necessary, and he could enter the village, locate the prisoners, and arrange for the rescue.

Once they knew where the prisoners were held, and the guards over them, Buffalo Bill felt that he and Surgeon Powell, aided by the Scalp Taker, could enter the village, disguised as Indians, and free the three prisoners.

At least they would make the desperate attempt to do so.

When duty and regard for Frank Fenton would prompt Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell to take the risk, the Scalp Taker was promised a fine horse, military saddle and bridle, and a rifle and revolvers, with blankets and other gifts, not to speak of the fame he would win, and the chance of securing a scalp or two.

This was too much to resist taking any risk, and so the compact was made and Buffalo Bill was to have the Scalp Taker accompany him on his return.

It was also decided that the Sioux Slayer and fifty young Red-skin Ropers should also go along to scout as far up into the Sioux country as it was thought advisable, and serve as a support to the party in going and coming on their rescue expedition.

This the Red-skin Lasso-Throwers were delighted to do, their young chief feeling no envy of the regard felt for Buffalo Bill, but rather being desirous of following his lead.

The Knife Killer was let into the secret, and frankly said that he was glad to have his young warriors go with the white chief.

He was delighted with the way they had been treated at the fort, and more than pleased with the presents sent to him, among which was a supply of provisions from Mrs. Markham.

He knew, too, that the large band then with Major Melton's command would be equally as well treated, and that they would also return well laden with presents.

The only regret that he had was in again losing the Singing Dove, but then he was silent as to his desire to have her remain against her will, as she plainly told him that she wished to return to her people, and yet would prove that she had not forgotten him and those she cared for in the Pawnee camp.

It was just sunrise the next morning when Buffalo Bill and Singing Dove rode out of the village at the head of the Red-skin Ropers under their young chief.

The whole village escorted them for half a mile on their way, chanting war-songs,

* Many scalps.

beating tom-toms and otherwise showing their admiration, good wishes and adieux to the scout and the girl sharp-shooter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RED WORK AHEAD.

It was the desire of Buffalo Bill to push with all haste to the camp of Captain Grayson, hoping to find that Major Melton was still there with the command, for he knew that it was that officer's plan to remain near the border of the Sioux country for several days to show the Sioux scouts, who would be watching the soldiers, that they were ready to give them battle again should they seek to get revenge for the Hermit Pass fight.

So Buffalo Bill pushed on for a hard day's ride from the Indian village, and it was just nightfall when they ascended the ridge ten miles from the timber which had so nearly proven the burial place of himself, Singing Dove and those with them.

In the distance there was the glimmer of camp-fires that told the troops were still camped there, so the scout decided to push on for the camp, as he expected that a start for the fort might be made at dawn the next morning.

So the tired horses were urged on, the braves being willing, assured that they would get a hearty pale-face supper upon their arrival and rest after it.

Singing Dove seemed tireless, and when the scout asked her if she could stand the fatigue of the extra two hours' ride, she replied that she could remain all night in the saddle if necessary.

The bugler was just sounding "taps" when Buffalo Bill was challenged by the sentinel on the further outpost, and responded:

"It is Cody, sentinel, and I have no countersign."

"Those with me are my Pawnee Pards, the Red-skin Ropers."

"Corporal of the guard!" sung out the sentinel, and "Post Number One," was quickly visited by the corporal and the party rode on to camp.

Major Melton was up and gave Buffalo Bill a warm welcome, as did Captains Grayson, Emory and the other officers.

The Singing Dove was escorted to the camp with the other freed captives and they were glad to see her return, while the Red-skin Ropers went over to camp with their comrades and were well cared for, receiving the hearty supper they had hoped for.

"We start at dawn for the fort, Cody, if your sharp-shooter. Fighting Frank, does not bring in tidings to keep us here, for he is off on a scout now, to see if the Sioux had reinforced their beaten bands and were coming to head us off in our retreat."

"Had Surgeon Powell any reason for supposing that they were moving in force, sir?"

"Well, yes, for he has been constantly on the go with your scouts and half a hundred of the Pawnees, and they have seen signs that led them to believe that the Sioux wanted revenge for their late thrashing, and I really hope that they do, for we have every desire in the world to accommodate them."

"Well, Major Melton, if they are preparing to give you a surprise on your retreat, Surgeon Powell will discover it," said Cody.

"I am sure of that; but you have had a hard ride of it, so eat your supper and turn in for the night."

This advice Buffalo Bill readily took, and he was sleeping soundly long after midnight when he felt a touch on his arm and heard the words:

"Get up, pard, for there is red work to be done."

"Doctor Powell?"

"Yes, but keep quiet, for the camp is supposed to be asleep and unsuspecting danger."

"Then you made some discovery on your scout?"

"Yes, the Sioux were so wild at their defeat, that they sent for reinforcements and have been watching us from the mountains ever since."

"They are now in the range, coming over

the same trail they retreated by and are in very large force."

"You see we are almost under the shadow of the hills here, and the meadow land beyond the timber drowns all sound of hoofs even when made by thousands of ponies."

"As we surprised them here, coming right across the open plain to do so, they have decided that they can surprise us, coming as they do out of the hills, across the meadow land and shielded by the belt of timber only a few hundred yards from our camp."

"So they are massing there over two thousand warriors strong, and their ponies are all muzzled to prevent a neigh or a snort of alarm being heard."

"They will charge out of the timber two thousand strong just at daybreak, and rush right over the camp, capturing our guns, stampeding our horses, and riding down our men, while they will get scalps, booty and stock galore."

"You've got it all down fine, Frank."

"Yes, I heard the whole deal, Buttons and myself, for we took big chances and attended their council uninvited."

"You do take big chances, Doc."

"Yes, like another person I know."

"Well, let us go to the major and report."

"My dear Bill, for the first time, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, you have slept while others worked."

"The major knows it all, every arrangement has been made, the men are sleeping on their arms, the horses corralled and we are just awaiting the coming of our guests, who hoped to completely surprise us."

"The major said you should not be disturbed until the last moment, so I allowed you to sleep, but now get the sand out of your eyes for there is red work ahead of us."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

READY.

THE men, after having been aroused, were placed in position and allowed to sleep again until called for the struggle.

The guns, with muffled wheels had been moved to one side of the camp, facing the hills, to deliver a battery discharge several times, and then go into their respective positions to beat off flank movements.

The horses had all been corralled in the timber, to prevent a stampede, and the wounded and captives were placed under the shelter of the banks of the stream.

Saddles, harness and all else that could be useful were placed in line as breastworks for the men, and ropes had been stretched across the plain at certain heights to trip and throw the charging Indian ponies.

The Pawnees had been placed in the front, to deliver their fire of arrows, and then retreat behind the line of soldiers so that they could open with carbines and muskets.

Once the charging line was broken the cavalry, whose horses were saddled, and the Pawnees and scouts, were to charge out upon the Sioux supported by the infantry and artillery to fall back upon in case they were too heavily outnumbered, or the fight was more stubbornly resisted than it was expected that it would be.

Both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell made it very plain to Major Melton that the Sioux might be in still larger force than it was believed, and that they would fight most desperately to wipe out their late defeat and avenge themselves.

The prospect of the horses, booty and scalps they would secure would make them fight with desperation, and if only the two thousand the Surgeon Scout had estimated them to number, they would still be three to one against the force the major had to resist them with.

Major Melton had not left a thing undone to insure success, and he had estimated that his force, including the Pawnees, numbered over six hundred, not including the artillery.

Still as though they been lying dead on the battle field, soldiers, scouts and Pawnees lay upon their arms awaiting the signal to spring to action.

Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, Buttons, the chief Sioux Slayer and Scalp Taker were out in the front toward the hills, the sentinels having been called in from that direction so

as to cause no confusion or accident when the Sioux moved to the attack.

Then five experts in scouting had ventured far toward the timber, crawling upon the ground, and each one of them had heard sounds to prove that the Sioux were taking their position in the timber to prepare for their charge at dawn.

Still as they were, so still that they would never have attracted the attention of a soldier sentinel on his post, there was yet sound enough to let Buffalo Bill and those with him know that a very large army of red horsemen were forming for a rush upon the camp which they intended should be a complete surprise, and more, a perfect victory for them.

They had no thought that it was known they had rallied their beaten bands, reinforced them and were coming now to strike back.

"We must retreat to the camp, for they will soon be sending out their scouts to look for the position of our sentinels," whispered Buffalo Bill as the five met together after having heard enough each one of them to be assured that the Sioux were getting into position.

Returning to the headquarters, Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell found Major Melton sitting in the dark with the captains of the various companies about him.

"Well, doctor, you and Cody are back again?"

"Yes, major."

"And you think the Sioux are preparing to give us a surprise?"

"I know it, major; but Cody is the scout, so he will make his report."

"Out with it, Cody, and let us know the worst."

"The Sioux are assembling in the timber, Major Melton, and they are in very heavy force, I am certain; in fact, sir, it would be well not to await their coming within easy range, as was decided, but to fire the guns the moment they start on their charge."

"It is best, I guess, and we will do so," and turning to the captain of the battery the major gave him the necessary orders.

After some further conversation, it was decided that all should go to their respective posts, for it was just half an hour before dawn.

As Buffalo Bill went to take his position among his scouts and Red Ropers, he found Singing Dove there, and she said, earnestly:

"Don't send me away, for I have my rifle, and every bullet counts."

Before he could reply there came from the timber a wild chorus of yells in two thousand voices, the war-cries of the Sioux as they started upon their charge upon the camp.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CARNIVAL OF DEATH.

THE Sioux expected their wild yell to awaken the camp in terror, and to create a panic, which their coming would aid them in turning into a stampede.

The several hundred yards they had to ride, they expected to cover at full speed, and in a minute, or little over, of time, then, with one irresistible and unresisted rush to be in the midst of their foes, whom they were well aware they outnumbered four to one.

The Pawnees they held a grudge against of long standing, with added bitterness for their alliance with the whites, and the way they had beaten them at Hermit Pass.

Before their greedy eyes scalps flitted by the score, and they beheld splendid cavalry horses all their own, saddles, bridles, weapons unnumbered and blankets and supplies.

So each Sioux had thrown into his voice, in uttering that preliminary war-cry, the hatred of years, the greed for gain and the anticipation of a full revenge for all wrongs.

With bounds, as though starting upon a race, the willing and well rested ponies had started on the grand charge.

But hardly had the echoes of the wild cries rolled back from the hills when eight guns burst forth red flames, and eight shrieking shells went crashing into the mass of men and beasts.

Bursting as they struck it was like another

discharge as the shells tore through human forms, staggering horses and riders alike.

Hardly had the roar of the guns ceased when a perfect shower of arrows fell in the faces of the Sioux, followed instantly by the cracking of the cavalry carbines, and with the steady musketry fire of the infantry ending up the first clash of the terrible serenade of death.

Then the guns were ready loaded again and the battle had begun in such deadly earnest that the Sioux were the surprised ones and they staggered back from the terrors of red death, back upon those in their rear, and a wild flight for the timber was begun almost before the leaders in the line had reached two-thirds of the way to the camp.

Had the chiefs intended to halt their lines shattered, bleeding, surprised and terrified in the timber, the intention was of no avail when loud and clear above the roar of fire-arms came the startling cries of Buffalo Bill and his men, the yelping shouts of the Pawnees and the cheers of the cavalry led by Captain Emory, as they all dashed out upon the confused, tottering, struggling, dead and wounded mass of warriors and their ponies.

With yells, rattling revolvers, clashing sabers and the whirling lassoes of the Red-skin Ropers, the avengers were upon the Sioux, riding them down, cutting them down with keen blades, dragging them from their saddles with merciless lariats, shooting and knifing them at close quarters, and bearing them back before the irresistible avalanche of the charging squadron.

The cannon had ceased their angry booming, the musketry had ceased its rattle, for it was the inning of the mounted men, the cavalry, the scouts, the Pawnee horsemen, and the carnival of death was a ghastly one.

Through the timber the Sioux were driven like a herd of frightened deer, over the meadow-land, all seeking flight now, thinking only of escape from the foes that rushed them to death and doom.

On, on after the flying Sioux rushed the soldiers the scouts and the Pawnees, pressing them hard in their flight to safety in the mountains.

Some of them, to escape the doom that threatened, sprung from their ponies and sought hiding-places in the timber and among the rocks, where the light of day had not yet penetrated.

Not wishing to allow his men to go too far, Major Melton fired signal-guns to recall them, and the officers in command soon understood what it meant and had the buglers sound the recall.

The Pawnees, maddened by the fight, and the Sioux in full flight, pressed on and were unmindful that the moment the pale-faces ceased the pursuit, the fugitives, seeing only their red foes upon their track at once plotted to entrap them.

They had begun to drop back in force large enough to engage them, and larger bands of Sioux were about to surround them, when Buffalo Bill saw through the cunning game and dashed to the rescue with Surgeon Powell by his side and his scouts following him.

He was just in time to shout out in the Pawnee tongue that they were being led into a trap when the Sioux began to close in upon them in vastly superior numbers.

It then became a question of cutting their way through and giving the Sioux revenge and perhaps part of the victory after all when Captain Emory took in the situation at a glance, and disobeying the recall under the circumstances, came charging ahead again with his troopers.

The result was electrical, for the Sioux at once stampeded again and the Pawnees and scouts were rescued from their danger and the bugle again sounded the recall, for the battle was won.

CHAPTER XL.

THE INDIAN COURIER.

As the pursuers began to start upon the return to the camp, a lieutenant dashed up with orders from Major Melton for a quick recall of all, soldiers, scouts and Pawnees, as the artillery was coming up to take possession and shell the retreating Sioux as far as the guns could reach them.

Instantly the orders were given to ride to a rise ahead a quarter of a mile and form there, and the guns came up at a run, unlimbered and went into action at that point.

Under this new encouragement to move on the Sioux continued their flight, the shells bursting over them and in their midst as they climbed the hill until they were out of range.

Then every soldier was made a Good Samaritan and the wounded were at once looked after.

But though dead Sioux were plentiful few wounded were found, and the soldiers had to look after their own comrades almost entirely.

The wounded, soldiers and Indians, were borne back to the camp, and Doctor Powell and his assistant surgeon at once had their hands full, all those who could aiding in the good work of caring for the suffering.

Major Melton had ordered those in camp to have a good breakfast ready, and the returning prisoners of the Sioux were soon discussing it, Pawnees and soldiers side by side.

As the loss to the Sioux had been exceedingly heavy, and the bodies must be buried, the major knew that he would be detained a couple of days longer in camp, and have to march more slowly on account of his additional wounded, so he decided to send an officer to the fort with the news of this third battle and victory won.

As Surgeon Powell had been the one to discover the plot of the Sioux, the honor of being the bearer of the news was offered to him and promptly declined with the words:

"I thank you, Major Melton, but I must decline the honor, as my duty is just as assuredly here with the sufferers as it was in the front in action."

"Just what I knew you would say, Powell, and I would have felt regret had you accepted the mission," the major replied, and Captain Emory, who had been slightly wounded, was asked to bear the tidings to the fort.

"Not I, as the Sioux are as fickle as a woman, and may again attack us and I'd miss it."

"Send a courier, major, and that will leave all at the fort to consider that each and every one of us so distinguished himself that to single out one for the honor of bearing the tidings would be unfair to the others."

"Yes, send a courier," cried several of the officers present, while Buffalo Bill said:

"Pardon me, major, but may I offer a suggestion, sir, that might do good just now?"

"Certainly, Cody, fire away, if you are not tired firing after your splendid work of to-day, for let me say that you covered yourself with honor."

"Thank you, sir."

"But I was going to say, sir, that as our new allies would understand that it was a great honor to carry the news to Colonel Markham, and all can testify to the splendid courage of the young chief of my Red-skin Ropers, Sioux Slayer, that it might be well to intrust him with the letter, and from the looks of his string of fresh scalps, it will be proof positive to the colonel that the Sioux have suffered very heavy loss."

All laughed at this sally of the scout, for they had seen how busy the Pawnees were in scalping the Sioux, no one wishing to interfere in the very ghastly work owing to the late treaty of peace having just been consummated.

"Sioux Slayer is my man, Cody, and, as you say, the colonel need not be told that the Sioux lost heavily, when he sees his string of gay trophies."

"We will make the sending of the chief as impressive as possible, just for the effect it will have with his comrades."

The letter was accordingly written in the presence of the assembled chiefs, the major dictating it to his adjutant in an impressive manner, and making particular mention of the Pawnees, and especially of Sioux Slayer.

It was sealed with red wax and then placed in the hands of the young chief, Buffalo Bill explaining to him just what he was to do and just what the honor meant.

The eyes of Sioux Slayer danced with joy, but otherwise his face was unmoved, and his fellow chiefs seemed also greatly

pleased at the distinction shown their popular young comrade.

Having received his orders, Sioux Slayer sprung upon his horse and darted away upon his ride to the fort, carrying also a note from Buffalo Bill to the colonel, stating that he had found Singing Dove.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FORGOTTEN LETTER.

As the days passed and no other word came from Major Melton, Colonel Markham began to feel a little anxious.

He knew well the treacherous nature of the Sioux, and though he had perfect confidence in Major Melton and his officers, still he knew that he was vastly outnumbered did the Indians attempt a blow in revenge.

Then he recalled how far the command was away from the fort, the dangerous trail for a courier to follow, and decided that all was well and the soldiers would soon put in an appearance.

The colonel also could not but feel anxiety for Buffalo Bill.

He had gone off alone with a party of newly-made allies, and to continue on to the Pawnee village if there were need to do so in search of the missing girl, Singing Dove.

At last the suspense began to be so great that Colonel Markham decided to dispatch an officer with a scout and small escort, to see if anything was wrong at the front.

He had just told his adjutant to issue the order, when it was reported that a courier was coming toward the fort, and along the trail that Major Melton's command had taken.

Next came the tidings that it was an Indian horseman and he was forcing a seemingly tired horse hard.

In half an hour more Sioux Slayer drew up his tired horse before the colonel's quarters.

He could not speak English, and no one was about the gate who spoke Pawnee, so the officer of the day had a hard time of it until he recognized the young chief as one who had been with Buffalo Bill and the Red-skin Lasso-Throwers.

Then the chief revealed his letter, but would not part with it, and the officer of the day of the day led him to headquarters, sending to the camps for an old hunter who spoke Pawnee well to come and act as interpreter.

The colonel recognized Sioux Slayer at a glance, grasped his hand, fearing evil to Buffalo Bill, and was delighted when he was given the letter, which, beside the address upon the official envelope had:

"Forwarded by

"SIoux SLAYER,

"Chief of Buffalo Bill's Red-skin Ropers."

Sioux Slayer looked the picture of contentment, though his face showed that he had been a trusty courier, having not once closed his eyes, or halted longer than for the comfort of his hardy horse, on the long ride.

The old hunter had arrived, and Colonel Markham read the letter with exclamations of delight at the third victory won and made the news known at once through the fort.

Sioux Slayer was given a cordial welcome, and through the interpreter the colonel explained to him how much he appreciated his splendid services, while all examined his string of scalps with great interest if not admiration.

The letter told of the fight, and how Surgeon Powell had discovered the plot, also of the arrival of Buffalo Bill and his Red-skin Ropers in time to be of most signal service in the battle.

It gave the list of killed and wounded among the soldiers and scouts, and Colonel Markham remarked earnestly:

"The odds in slain are appallingly against the Indians, and Melton has gained these victories with the loss of but few of his command, showing how well all was planned and executed."

"As usual, Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell added to their fame, and each and all of the officers and men deserve the highest praise, not forgetting our good allies the Pawnees."

The colonel was much pleased to learn

by Buffalo Bill's letter that the fair young runaway, Singing Dove, had been rescued, and was returning with the command to the fort.

But there was one thing that troubled him, and caused him to say:

"It is too late to stop them now, or I would do so."

What it was that worried him was the fact that Cody had written:

"Anxious to save poor Private Fenton and his comrades, sir, I have enlisted in the work a young Pawnee by the name of Scalp Taker, who was for a long time a captive of the Sioux and knows their village and its surroundings well.

"Surgeon Powell also has said he would accompany me, and I will also take along Sioux Slayer and his band of Lasso-Throwers, when the chief returns from the fort."

The fact that it was too late to prevent the going of the scout on this expedition of attempting the rescue of Frank Fenton and his comrades, was that Sioux Slayer had not given Buffalo Bill's letter to the colonel with the major's dispatch.

He had forgotten it, and having said that he must return at once to his braves, he had been feasted and rested, and upon a fresh horse given him by the colonel, had started upon the trail that night, when awakened at twelve o'clock as had been his wish.

Then he had thought of the scout's letter and giving it to the corporal told him to give it to the colonel, as well as he could make him understand.

So it was after he had had his breakfast that the colonel received the letter, and he knew that no courier could overtake Sioux Slayer then, or arrive at the camp until a day behind him.

"I am sorry, but I cannot stop their going now; but I hope good, not evil will come of it, for I would so like to have that gallant young Fenton saved from torture," said Colonel Markham sadly.

CHAPTER XLII.

OFF TO THE RESCUE.

It was a surprise to Major Melton and all of the command, when Sioux Slayer put in an appearance at the camp while he was still supposed to be at the fort.

He had made the ride in wonderfully quick time, and he gave his return dispatches to the major with an air of proud triumph at what he had done.

He had ridden his new horse hard, but not to hurt him and his first duty was to care for him as soon as he had delivered the major his dispatches.

Major Melton smiled proudly at the words of praise written to him and his command by the colonel, and at once told his adjutant to read the letter at dress parade that evening, for the strictest military discipline was maintained in the camp.

In the time that the Indian chief had been absent one of the soldiers had died of his wounds, also a scout and several of the Pawnees; but the other wounded were much improved, and the major was anxious to start on the return trail to the fort as soon as he could do so and not risk the lives of the injured men.

Consulting with Surgeon Powell that night the latter told him that the wounded would stand the travel, if he made only a few miles each day, and it was decided to start about ten o'clock the following morning and make a distance of about ten miles the first day.

"I will leave Assistant Surgeon Beckwith in charge, Major Melton, as I shall accompany Cody on his expedition," continued Surgeon Powell, and Buffalo Bill just then came up to the major's quarters.

"Go with Cody on his expedition you say, Powell?" asked the major with surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"And what expedition are you going on, Cody?" and Major Melton turned to the scout who responded:

"I have just come to tell you, sir, but I have kept it a secret from all save Surgeon Powell and Buttons, if I except my Red-skin Ropers

"I hope that you do not intend again to place your valuable life in jeopardy, Cody, and drag Powell and others with you?"

"Well, major, I suppose I must say that we are not going upon a pleasant trip; but we shall take no greater risks than the duty we have to do actually demands."

"And what is it, Cody?"

"The truth is, major, that I have formed a very strong friendship for that splendid young fellow Frank Fenton, and he is now in the hands of the Sioux, with two other soldiers, and all are liable to be tortured to death at any time, and you know what that means sir."

"Indeed I do, Cody, and I feel for young Fenton and the others."

"Now I believe, sir, with the aid of a Pawnee, Scalp Taker, who was so long a captive to the Sioux that he knows them thoroughly, that we can rescue those prisoners."

"I fear not, Cody, though I hope so sincerely."

"We can at least make the trial and all of us will feel better that it was made, even if we are unsuccessful."

"But think of the risk, Cody, and we cannot afford to lose you or Surgeon Powell, even to save a score of men."

"You are very kind, major, to say so; but there never was a man so useful that he could not be replaced if harm befell him, and I would be a poor specimen of a friend, not to speak of a scout, if I did not make an effort to save Frank Fenton."

"But Colonel Markham, I am sure, would put his veto upon your going, and Powell's, too."

"I wrote Colonel Markham of my intention, sir, and that Surgeon Powell was to accompany me."

"And what did he say?"

"Sioux Slayer brought me no reply to my letter, sir, in fact, sir, it did not require one."

"Well, if Colonel Markham agreed to your going, by silence if not by writing, and said nothing in his letter to me against it, I suppose I would be overstepping my authority to forbid your very reckless undertaking."

"I am glad that you do not, sir, for I cannot but believe we will rescue young Fenton, and, I trust, lose no valuable lives in doing so."

"All right, Cody; you know what you are about, and Powell is the best pard you could have to tie to in such an emergency; so I can only say go ahead, and Heaven grant you win the desperate game you are going to stake so much upon, and return to the fort in safety."

"We can but lose, major, if we do not win, and neither Cody nor myself are reckless in spite of our taking often what may appear to be big chances against us."

"We reconnoiter well before we leap," said Doctor Powell, now speaking for the first time.

"Well, you always are successful, that is certain," was the major's reply, and when he heard that Sioux Slayer and his Lasso-Throwers, and Buttons, the scout, were also going along, he felt better over the terrible risk the surgeon and the scout were taking.

"And, Major Melton, when Doctor Fairfax was killed he left his daughter to my guardianship, sir, and I wish to ask you to kindly take her under your care until she reaches Colonel Markham's home."

"I will gladly do so, Cody," replied the major.

And he bade the surgeon and the scout good-by, while the camp when aroused the next morning discovered that Buffalo Bill and his Red-skin Ropers had gone off on some secret expedition.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON THE WATCH.

As soon as she learned that Buffalo Bill had left the camp, Singing Dove went at once to Major Melton and asked if it was true.

"It is, Miss Singing Dove," the major said courteously, gazing with admiration upon the beautiful girl.

"Why did he not tell me of his going?"

"Well, he wished to keep the affair a secret from every one it seems."

"He has been good to me, I owe him my life more than once, and my father left me to his guardianship."

"He was the only friend I have and he was to take me to the fort."

"I believe that I can tell you a secret."

"Yes."

"Cody went on a special service where duty called him, and it was an expedition he did not wish to be known, so it was merely given out that he had gone on a scout to see what the Sioux were doing."

"But such is not the case then?"

"I will only say that in going he not only spoke of you, and requested me to take you under my especial espionage, but he left with me a note for you."

"A letter!"

"Oh give it to me, for it may explain all."

The major handed her the letter left by Cody for her.

It was in an envelope and unsealed, and she looked at it strangely, and seemed to hesitate about opening it.

"Why do you not read it, Miss Singing Dove?"

She looked him straight in the face and answered:

"This is the first letter I ever received—is it not strange?"

Major Melton gazed at her with increased admiration.

Surely this captive girl was a very different being from what he had supposed her to be.

Then she slowly took the letter from the envelope, unfolded it and read it aloud:

"You will pardon me for leaving without seeing you, but I depart before dawn, and Major Melton, to whose care I leave you, and who will see you safely in the care of Colonel Markham, will explain my going and will befriend you as I would."

"Hoping to find you happily instated in your new home when I return to the fort, believe me,

"Your guardian,

"BUFFALO BILL."

Such was the letter that she read aloud, and having finished it, she said:

"I thank you, sir, and I will give you as little trouble as possible."

"It will be my pleasure to look to your ease and comfort, Miss Singing Dove, until you are in the charge of Colonel Markham, and in any way that I can serve you, command me."

"Thank you, sir."

"And permit me to congratulate you upon your splendid shot in the fight the other day."

"I took occasion to speak of you to Colonel Markham, and state that you not only risked your life in defending the camp, but rode in the charge upon the Sioux."

"You are a very strange young lady, Miss Singing Dove."

"I am not a young lady, for I am a poor, unfortunate, friendless girl, ignorant, wild as the Indians I have lived among, and know nothing of the life I am to enter upon at the fort, and if you are to be my friend, you will have a great deal to teach me."

"It will be a pleasure to do so."

"Now, may I ask if you are comfortable in your camp and have what provisions you wish?"

"Oh, yes, I am comfortable, and I have all I care for, thank you."

"When you are on the trail may I ride with you sometimes and have you tell me of the fort and your people?"

"Indeed you may, and I will be most pleased to have you," and the major muttered to himself as Singing Dove departed:

"When that wild beauty reaches the fort men will love her and women hate her for the hearts she will win."

When the command pulled out on the march, Singing Dove enjoyed seeing the scouts ride to the front, some of the cavalry follow, then the wounded carried in ambulances and on *travois*, and next the mounted infantry, followed by the freed captives, after which came the artillery, then more troopers and the Pawnees bringing up the rear.

Major Melton had kept his word and sent a lieutenant for Singing Dove, having her sitting in her saddle near him, as he took his position to see the command pass by, after which he rode to the front with her, taking his place in the rear of the scouts.

As they rode along the major told her much that was of interest to her until, with a propriety worthy of a society-bred maiden, she thanked him and rode back to take her place with the captives, greatly to the regret of the young officers who had been charmed with her company, and which she did not care to inflict upon them too long.

CHAPTER XLIV.

TRANSPLANTING A WILD FLOWER.

THE march the first day on the trail was for three hours only, when a good camping-place was found, and Singing Dove greatly enjoyed the picturesque scene of going into camp.

Doctor Beckwith gave all the wounded a call at once, and was glad to report to Major Melton that no ill effects were visible in any of them.

Both parties of scouts and Pawnees went out on a reconnaissance of the surrounding country, but found no signs of danger, though when night came on a strong guard was kept on duty against a surprise.

The next day a start was made after a late breakfast, and twenty miles was the day's march, Singing Dove again riding for an hour with the major, to the envy of the young officers.

The third day's march placed thirty miles to the credit of the command, and the wounded stood the tax well.

So the march was kept up until the fort came in view.

Singing Dove was sent for to come to the front, and the major said to her:

"Do you see that flag flying yonder Miss Singing Dove?"

"Yes, it is the fort?"

"It is, and very soon the Wild Rose of the Mountains will be transplanted in another atmosphere, amid other scenes.

"Are you not glad?"

"I do not know, for the Wild Rose, as you speak of we may but wither and die amid the new scenes she is unused to."

"No fear of that; but see how grandly the fort looms up.

"Yes, and they see us and are preparing to give us a cordial welcome, so I must brush up the boys and pull the command together so it will be at its best."

"Am I in your way, sir, in the front here?"

"No, indeed so here you must remain, for remember I am your guardian now, in the absence of Buffalo Bill, and I am to present you to the colonel."

Her lips slightly trembled, but she replied:

"I shall be glad to remain if you will permit."

"Yes, we are to have a salute I see.

"The flags are going up everywhere that one can be set, and the men are being called to their posts."

The fort was looming up and Singing Dove looked on with a strange expression upon her face, one of commingled timidity and dread.

The major saw how she felt and wished to comfort her by pointing out all that would be of interest to her.

The command had been pulled together into close order, and men and horses seemed to feel the thrill of the occasion of coming home as three times victors.

The Pawnees looked on with interest and a certain awe, for they were approaching what had been a dead line to them in the past.

Silent and grim as statues they rode along, while at heart they were more than glad of their alliance with the pale-faces, whose greatness they now began to appreciate more than ever before.

"Ah, they are going to give us a salute with the guns," said the major, and as he spoke there belched forth from the fort a cloud of smoke, followed by the deep roar of a twelve-pounder.

Gun after gun was fired until the salute to the victors had ended, then the flag was dipped three times and cheer after cheer followed from the garrison, when suddenly the brass band broke out into a melody of welcome by playing:

"The Star Spangled Banner."

Major Melton glanced at Singing Dove and saw that she was deeply moved.

She had never, to her recollection, heard a brass band before, and it thrilled her through and through, and she cried with enthusiasm:

"How grand, how beautiful!"

"I shall like it here, I know I will.

"I only wish that I was a soldier—but I cannot be, can I, sir, for I am only a girl?"

"Only a girl, yes, but one who will soon know her power, yes, command soldiers more readily than the chief can, or I am greatly mistaken.

"Now we are entering the fort," and the command began to file into the garrison amid the wildest of cheers, waving of flags and handkerchiefs, and the deep booming of the guns, again saluting the victor, while the band played a lively welcoming air.

The face of Singing Dove was flushed with excitement, her eyes ablaze, and she did not see that every eye was upon her, did not appear to think of herself until Major Melton halted, lifted her from the saddle, and as Colonel Markham advanced and grasped his hand, said:

"And here, colonel, is the wild flower I have brought to transplant in the fort."

"God bless you, my dear child, you are welcome to our hearts and our homes.

"Come, for my wife awaits to greet you, to claim you for us as though you were our own flesh and blood."

Singing Dove saw before her a tall, martial form, a handsome, kindly face with gray mustache, and a look that often dwelt in her father's eyes when regarding her.

Before she could reply a lovely-faced woman came forward and said, as she greeted the major:

"And is this beautiful girl Buffalo Bill's ward of whom he told us, and who is to make her home with us?"

"Ah, my child, how glad am I to take you to my heart and try and replace the mother you knew only in your childhood," and the young girl was drawn away by Mrs. Markham and found herself in a totally different atmosphere from what she had known.

Buffalo Bill's ward, the Wild Flower, had indeed been transplanted to bloom amid different scenes.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE MASCOT OF FORT READY.

OF all the comments made upon the fair captive, rescued by Buffalo Bill from the Pawnees, there was not a single one that was unfavorable to her.

She was a beauty all admitted, her features being perfect, her bearing dignified though perhaps a trifle brusque in speech, and her form was the perfection of grace.

There was a refinement about her that was marked, and never having heard bad English spoken, her father being a scholar, she made no mistakes for others to carp upon.

The memories of her childhood had helped her amazingly in the wild life she had been forced to lead, and there was nothing common about her.

She spoke of God as the Great Spirit, referred to heaven as the happy hunting-grounds and looked upon hades as an abiding place for bad Indians.

The ladies of the fort were in ecstasies over her manner of dressing in buckskin and embroidering it, but the moment she saw that pale-face women did not dress as she did she was anxious to get out of her leggings and short skirts.

Drawn at once toward Colonel Markham, from his resemblance to her father, and to his wife by her motherly greeting of her, Pearl Fairfax felt at home the moment she crossed the threshold of what she naively called the Council Lodge.

A pleasant room had been fitted up for her, the window looking out upon a fine view of valley, river and the mountains in the distance, with flowers growing in the little garden on that side of the colonel's quarters.

There was the neat bed, the bureau, easy-chair and all to make her comfortable, and she exclaimed when Mrs. Markham told her it was to be her room:

"Oh! what a beautiful tepee!"

A moment after, as she glanced out of the window, she said in a low tone:

"I was wrong not to think I would be happy here.

"May I call you mother?" and she looked up sweetly into Mrs. Markham's face, who answered, as tears came into her eyes:

"Yes, I wish you to call me mother, for you shall be my daughter, and we will learn to love you very dearly, Pearl."

"Pearl! how strange that name sounds to me—it comes back to me now so sweetly, as it did when I heard it long ago, for after we were captives, father and I, the Indians called me Singing Dove, for I used to sing about our tepee, and father called me Dove; but I like the old name of Pearl—Pearl Fairfax."

"It is a pretty name, but we shall change it as the Indians did, and call you Pearl Fairfax Markham, for remember you are to be our child."

"Yes, I am so glad.

"And I am to dress as you do, for I notice the ladies here do not wear leggings and moccasins and short skirts, and I don't wish to seem odd."

"You shall have new clothes, some that our daughter had made for her but never wore, and you are just her size."

"She is dead, Buffalo Bill said."

"Yes, she was thrown from her horse killed."

"Do not weep for her, as she is in the happy hunting-grounds and you will take the long trail there to see her when you die.

"I wish she was here, though, to be my sweet sister."

"Would to Heaven she were; but it was willed otherwise, and now you are sent to take her place in our hearts.

"See, here is clothing and I'll show you how to put them all on, and arrange your hair for you—why, what a tiny little foot you have, and Myrtle's shoes will also fit you, while your hands, though brown as chestnuts, are so small and shapely."

"I will soon learn your ways, and I wish you to love me, and the big white chief too—he who is to be my father."

"I am so glad Buffalo Bill said I must come."

"You were naughty to run away, and just to think what a narrow escape you had."

"Yes, for I would have taken my own life rather than have fallen into the hands of the Sioux."

"I am not afraid to die, for I would see my dear father in the happy hunting-grounds, and he must be lonely on the long trail without me—I wish he knew your daughter there."

Mrs. Markham turned away to hide her tears, and soon after left Pearl to her own reveries and sought her husband.

"Mabrey, that beautiful girl has already won my heart.

"She is as innocent as a little child, and will be such a joy to us in our home," and Mrs. Markham told him of all the girl's quaint sayings and actions.

When it was supper time Pearl met her adopted father again at the table, and both the colonel and his wife were surprised at her table manners, and she explained it by saying:

"Father would not live as the Indians did, and he made bone forks and spoons, and we had knives some of the Indians had gotten in their raids, and we made wooden dishes, while we always had our table set just as we had down at our old home.

"I did the cooking, and I killed the game and caught fish so we got along very well, for father had a garden too and raised vegetables, and he taught the Pawnees a great many good things the pale-faces knew."

That evening colonel and Mrs. Markham held a reception and they felt proud in presenting their adopted daughter to the officers and their families, and those who had expected to meet an uncouth, awkward ignorant girl were vastly mistaken and were charmed with her.

She greeted Major Melton, and the officers she had met on the expedition as old friends, and naively asked why the warriors, meaning the private soldiers, were not at the council.

"And this is the daring dead-shot that took the trail alone to return to her Pawnee home, who stood by the side of her father when he was killed, and seizing his rifle fought back the Sioux, the girl who had stood at bay upon the cliff, killing the red-skins who dared climb up to capture her, without food or

water or sleep, fighting as bravely as any man would have done, the girl who leaped upon her horse and joined in the desperate charge upon the Sioux?

"She is a wonder, and I verily believe it was her presence that saved Buffalo Bill and his party, and won for us our victories, so I name her the Mascot of Fort Ready."

So said Major Melton, and his words were greeted that night in the officers' club with cheers, and the health of "The Pearl of the Plains, the Mascot of Fort Ready" was drunk standing by the gallant soldiers present, one of whom, Captain Oscar Emory, called out:

"And here's to the health of Buffalo Bill and our gallant brother officer the Fighting Surgeon."

And this toast too was drunk standing and with a cheer.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SUSPENSE.

DAYS passed away, and the Pawnee band, delighted with their hospitable treatment at the fort, decided to return to their village, and so notified Colonel Markham.

They each once asked to see Pearl before their departure, and she went to their camp and shook hands with each one.

Colonel and Mrs. Markham had thoughtfully, knowing the Indian nature thoroughly, placed at her disposal numerous little gifts for her to send to those she cared to among the Pawnees, and this she did and was made happy by the opportunity.

The Pawnees went back laden with presents, all who gave thinking that they were getting off cheap in forming an alliance that would be of such value to them in the future.

Having bidden Pearl and the fort good-by the band of Pawnees started upon their homeward trail delighted with all they had seen and the manner of their reception.

But the days still went by and no word came of Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and those with them.

Few in the fort knew exactly the mission they had gone upon, but those who were in the secret began to grow most anxious for their safety.

The desperate danger of their undertaking those who knew where they had gone, fully appreciated, and, as the time wore on and no word came, Colonel Markham grew more and more anxious.

Again and again he and Major Melton would talk the matter over.

Then they would send for Buffalo Bill's scouts and get all the information they could from them as to the chances of the success or failure of the attempt.

The scouts always were ready to start in search of the missing ones, but Colonel Markham feared that they might in some way counteract Buffalo Bill's plans, so would not let them go.

He argued that it was hardly possible that the three white men and Sioux Slayer and his Red-skin Ropers could all have been killed or captured.

Certainly some one of them would have escaped any trap set for them, and so bring news to the fort.

This gave hope that there was delay in the movements of the rescuers, but no chance to send a courier with the information.

Pearl saw that the colonel was anxious and frankly asked him the cause.

In the time that she had been there she had improved wonderfully.

She had looked very beautiful in the pretty dresses she wore, and when on horseback was the admiration of even the women who envied her.

She was the same lovable girl to all she came in contact, and was with men just as she was with women, showing no preference and having no nonsense about her.

Her adopted parents had begun to love her desperately, and it was not very long before she had ceased calling the quarters "tepees," the soldiers "warriors," the officers "chiefs," the gatherings "councils," referring to one putting on his full uniform as "being in full war paint" calling hats "war-bonnets," addressing Surgeon Beckwith as the "medicine-man," speaking of her shoes as "moccasins," her stockings as "leggings," though she still spoke of God

as the "Great Spirit," and called heaven the "happy hunting-grounds."

But these little slips immensely amused the colonel and he made no effort to break her of them.

"Let her make her bad breaks, wife, as the young officers would say, for they are clever and I like to hear them."

"Of course, if they were studied it would have no charm, but, as it is, I like to hear her Indianize her surroundings," he would say to Mrs. Markham.

One day, when Colonel Markham and Major Melton were discussing the continued absence of Buffalo Bill and his party, Pearl entered the room and said:

"Pardon me, father, but I know what is troubling you so."

"Am I troubled about anything, Pearl?"

"Yes, you are."

"You have good eyes to see it."

"Not when I read it in the faces of those I love that there is sorrow in their hearts."

"You are troubled, and so is Major Melton, and mother and others that I have seen."

"And you know the cause, Pearl?" asked the colonel, with a smile.

"Yes, it is because Buffalo Bill, that handsome medicine-chief, and the Pawnee Lasso-Throwers have not returned to the fort, or sent you word that they are safe."

"You have read well, Pearl."

"And if they are in trouble, I can save them," was the decided response of the young girl.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AN OFFER OF SELF-SACRIFICE.

BOTH Colonel Markham and Major Melton were astounded at Pearl's decided assertion that it was in her power to save Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell.

They looked into her face and saw that she had spoken with all honesty of purpose.

"Well, Pearl, that is more than we can do, with all our soldiers, and, if you can save the surgeon and the scout, we must take you into our council and know how it can be done," said the colonel.

"Buffalo Bill went to the Sioux village to try and rescue his friend and others, is it not so, father?"

"Yes, he seemed to feel that Private Frank Fenton and two soldiers with him who were captured by the Sioux could be rescued."

"How many went?"

"The Scout Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, Buttons, one of Cody's men, Sioux Slayer, the Pawnee chief, and his band of Red Ropers."

"And they went to the Sioux village or near it?"

"Yes."

"The Sioux would take their prisoners to their village to torture them to death."

"Very true."

"And the scouts hoped in some way to enter the Sioux village and rescue them?"

"They did."

"Scalp Taker was along, and he had been a captive among the Sioux for a long while and speaks their language."

"Yes," said Major Melton.

"They are all great scouts and should not be taken, even by going into the Sioux country."

"Then why have they not returned?"

"They are perhaps waiting to act."

"Why not send me a courier, then?"

"Perhaps they are so situated they cannot do so."

"Then you do not feel that they are taken or killed?"

"Not when they are the great scouts they are, father."

"The Sioux are a great tribe and cunning as coyotes, as treacherous as snakes; but they do not believe any one would dare come near their village, so they would not be looking for those who have ventured there."

"They are in their village moping over their defeats and plotting revenge, for they are not now on the war-path and have no heart to go on the hunt for game."

"No, they are moody and savage, keeping close to their village."

"And the prisoners?"

"They are keeping them for future re-

venge, if they have not already killed them."

"But, if Buffalo Bill and his party are captured, you say you can save them, Pearl?"

"Yes, I can, father."

"How could you do so?"

The girl was silent for a moment, the two officers watching her attentively.

At last she said:

"As I understand it, your medicine-chief is a great man among the pale-faces?"

"Yes, Surgeon Powell is a very remarkable man, a most skillful surgeon and physician, a man of distinguished services and one who has done much to deserve the thanks of his Government and the regard of his fellow-men."

"He has been one who has led, in a measure, much of the wild life that Cody has, and is remarkable as a sharp shooter and Indian fighter."

"And Buffalo Bill would be a great loss to the army?"

"I know of no one, including myself, whom we could not more readily spare."

"He is a phenomenal man in many ways, has won promotion hundreds of times by his gallant acts, and yet would not take a regiment if offered to him, preferring to be chief of scouts to anything else, and to continue to do the desperately dangerous work he engages in to any other occupation."

"What about the other pale face?"

"Buttons?"

"Yes, father."

"He is a good man, a thorough scout, ranks next to Cody in the scouting band and would be a great loss to the service."

"Then there are the Pawnee Lasso-Throwers, father?"

"Yes."

"They would be a great loss to the Pawnee tribe, and cast a cloud over the victories won."

"It would be so."

"Well, father, I'll tell you what I will do."

"Yes, my child, but no more risks, remember."

"When I was in the Pawnee village the Sioux held several meetings with our tribe to see if they would bury the tomahawk between them and unite against the whites."

"Yes."

"The two villages met over in their summer camp, and the Pawnees and Sioux saw much of each other for several days, and Sun Eyes, then a young chief and the son of Death Dealer, the head chief of the Sioux, wished to marry me."

"Of course my father refused, and the two tribes parted without coming to any friendly terms and soon after went on the war-path against each other again."

"But one day a Sioux runner came to the village and asked Knife Killer, our head chief, for me to marry Sun Eyes."

"Knife Killer talked to my father and the runner went back with a refusal."

"Soon he came again and offered to surrender many white captives and Pawnees in their camp, in return for me."

"Again my father refused, and then Death Dealer sent Knife Killer the challenge to meet him alone and fight out the quarrel between them."

"You know the story of that; but when the Sioux drove me on the cliff they were young warriors of the once band of Chief Sun Eyes, and he commanded them, and called out to me that he would make any terms I would demand if I would accept him."

"Well, Pearl?"

"Now Sun Eyes is the head chief, and what I would say is that I am only a girl, worth nothing in comparison to Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, Buttons and the Pawnees, and I will let you send word to the chief that you will give me for them, and when I get to the Sioux village I will kill myself, for I could not marry an Indian, but I would save those who are so valuable to the service."

What Colonel Markham said at this noble, self-sacrificing offer had better not be written down, but both he and Major Melton gave Pearl to understand that it was not the pale-face way to sell a woman for the lives of others, and that other means must be taken to rescue Buffalo Bill and those with him.

But the story of Pearl's sacrifice could not be kept a secret and one and all honored her the more for the noble sentiment that prompted it.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SECRET MISSION.

WHEN Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell rode away from the camp of Major Melton, they were side by side, with Buttons following and the Pawnees bringing up the rear.

The two particular pards, Powell and Cody, held no fear but that Private Frank Fenton and his companions could be rescued.

They had talked over their plans, and went off with an avowed purpose in view and knew just where they were to go.

"I do not like the two men, Corbett and Bostwick who were captured with Fenton, but then I would none the less try to save them, Frank," said Buffalo Bill, while Powell answered:

"Nor do I like them.

"Bostwick was sick once, and he was so afraid he was going to die, so secretive about everything, and begged to have only his friend Corbett nurse him, while he insisted upon keeping his clothes under his pillow, as though fearful he would be robbed.

"He disgusted me, and I never thought he or Corbett would ever make good soldiers."

"How they got captured I cannot understand, though why poor Fenton has not been killed time and again when I expected he would, is incomprehensible, for he was so reckless he seemed to seek death."

"And bore a charmed life," added Surgeon Powell.

When the party had entered the Sioux country by crossing the range, which Hermit Pass split in twain, they held a long talk in camp one night.

Both Surgeon Powell and Buttons also speaking the Pawnee tongue, it was easy for the three white men to converse with Chief Sioux Slayer and Scalp Taker.

As the latter had scouted with the Sioux all over that country, and knew their favorite trails and haunts, he was selected as the one to guide the party through the Indian country.

It was their wish to avoid all trails where a Sioux might be met, or their own tracks discovered, and to go with the whole party to a camping-place which Scalp Taker knew well.

It had once been the situation of the Sioux village, but soon after going there they had been visited by a terrible epidemic, and hundreds were swept away by the disease.

As soon as they could do so they left the dreaded spot, for, in burying their dead they had discovered that they had hit upon the burying-place of other Indians ages before, and they considered that the Great Spirit had brought a curse of disease upon them for having gone there and disturbed the bones of those whose spirits were in the happy hunting-grounds.

Since they had left the spot, years before, when Scalp Taker was first taken prisoner, no Sioux had been known to visit the dreaded spot, the young warrior stated.

"That is the place for our camp, for the time has been too long for us to be hurt by the disease, whatever it was, and if their village was placed there then, wood, water and grass must be plentiful," said Surgeon Powell.

So it was that by a circuitous trail Scalp Taker led the way to the deserted village of the Sioux, the party covering up their trail wherever it was possible for them to do so.

They found upon their arrival that the spot was a small valley, well watered, timbered and with grass most plentiful for their horses.

The camp was pitched in a canyon, with two ways of escape from it, and where the fires could be built among the crevices of the cliffs from which the smoke would not escape to betray their presence there.

Major Melton had ordered the quartermaster and commissary of his command to supply the party most liberally, so that they had a dozen well-laden pack-horses along.

Game was plentiful of all kinds, the brooks were filled with fish, and the arrows of the Indians soon brought down deer and birds, while they caught some fine trout and perch from the streams.

The spot, Scalp Taker said, was not over fifteen miles, according to his ideas of distance, from the Sioux villages in which there were some six thousand Indians, their camps being three in number extending for several miles along a mountain stream, and the trail to which was impassable to "wheel guns," as he expressed it, in every direction.

And yet, far from help though they were, within so short a distance of the Indian country, the daring rescuers and their Indian allies, lay down peacefully to sleep that night, defying danger, while Scalp Taker went alone on a scout to pick out the best way to the Sioux village.

He returned at dawn, and reported that he had gone to the edge of the village, and the next night Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell accompanied him on the trail.

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN THE ENEMY'S LINES.

LEAVING Buttons, and Sioux Slayer and his Red-skin Ropers in the dreaded camp of the deserted Indian village, Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell accompanied Scalp Taker upon his perilous trail by night.

They both had perfect confidence in the young warrior, and going by night was their safety.

Both the scout and the surgeon were armed with bows and arrows, in addition to their fire-arms, as was Scalp Taker also.

They had gone prepared too to play Injun, as they were painted, and decked out as redskins, in case they ran upon any Sioux, for they might pass muster then, but not if there was a glimpse caught of their white faces and garb.

Both Powell and Cody spoke the Sioux tongue as well as several others, yet not so well that they could not be detected in an extended conversation.

Still it would be of service to them in a tight place, and the Scalp Taker could not be detected as not being a Sioux when he spoke the language, so that he was safe under ordinary circumstances.

It did not take his followers long to see that Scalp Taker had made no idle boast, when he said he knew the trails.

Though it had been long since he was there a captive, they came back to him the night before when he went over them, and he now moved forward without hesitation.

It was ten o'clock at night when they came to a ridge overlooking the Indian village near its center.

For an Indian in his blanket to be roving about the village at night was a common affair, and so it was decided that the scout and the surgeon, also playing red-skin, should enter the camps and stroll about in search of the prisoners, one at the upper, the other at the lower end of the valley.

From their knowledge of Indian life and ways, it would not be hard for either Buffalo Bill or Surgeon Powell to locate the tepee where they kept their prisoners.

The center, or main portion of the village was to be gone through by Scalp Taker.

It was there that Sun Eyes the head chief lived and the big medicine-men had their tepees, and Scalp Taker felt that he could go the rounds undiscovered.

There would be a saving of time too if the whole village could be visited in one night and prisoners located, and in a couple of hours, or a little longer the three men could go the rounds of it.

The arrangement was made to meet in that place, the starting-point, and await for each other until nearly dawn, and then take the trail for camp, whether all three arrived or not.

No one realized more than Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, hide it as they might, the desperate chances they were taking.

Of course with the Scalp Taker it was different, for he was a *bona fide* Indian, and could offer the excuse, if taken, that he had come back to be a Sioux.

But such a story would not be taken if told by the two greatest Indian-fighters on

the border, and whom the Sioux regarded with the greatest terror.

With a word at parting the three went on their way, Buffalo Bill, following the directions of Scalp Taker, sauntering leisurely along toward the lower village, enveloped in his blanket to his eyes, and assuming the stately stride of the Indian.

Doctor Powell, also enveloped in his blankets, and remembering Scalp Taker's directions of how to go, took his way to the upper village.

The Pawnee went straight toward the center village, and any Sioux seeing them would never have dreamed that treachery lurked six feet high beneath those blankets.

Buffalo Bill had not gone a quarter of a mile before he came to the first tepee.

There were several Indians lying about a small fire smoldering near, but no one noticed him.

He soon passed near a herd of ponies just driven in by their owner, and, as several started to break away he called out to the supposed Indian to head them off.

Buffalo Bill did so, and then stalked on his way.

The tepees now became more frequent, and in some the inmates were sleeping soundly, at others there were seen groups about the fires, some cooking, others talking, for an Indian eats when he is hungry, sleeps when he needs rest, and is not governed by set rules as to time.

One squaw spoke to Buffalo Bill, but, with a sullen grunt, he passed on, paying no attention to her.

A warrior called to him, addressing him by the name of some comrade whom he supposed that he was; but the scout did not heed, drew his blanket higher about his face, and passed on.

But his eyes were busy searching for the tepee which would be conspicuous as the prison of the captives.

Seeing a larger tepee than the others, he boldly passed near it and heard the sound of voices within.

That it was a Council Lodge he well knew, and, taking the chances, though knowing that it was death to an Indian even, as a penalty for listening to the pow-wows of their chiefs, he hung about for a few minutes and caught enough of what was said to learn that they were still bemoaning their defeat and plotting revenge upon the pale-faces.

CHAPTER L.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

ONE thing that Buffalo Bill's ears caught that was said in the council tepee was the utterance of a chief who said, violently:

"We were beaten by the hated pale-faces, our chiefs and our young men fell before them like trees before a storm, their wheel-guns struck us with mighty thunder, and when we struck for revenge we only found more sorrow for our people, until now we have come back without a white man's gun, a pony, a captive, and with only a few braves carrying the scalp-lock of our hated foes at his belt."

Buffalo Bill would have lingered to hear more, but he saw two warriors coming, so he moved on past the tepee, muttering to himself:

"So they did not capture a prisoner, a pony or a gun, by the statement of that chief."

"Can he mean the immediate band belonging to this end of the village or the entire outfit?"

"If they did not take a prisoner we are on the wrong track and are taking fearful risks for nothing."

"I need not look for prisoners, after what I have just heard, but I will take a scout around the other tepees, to have a look at the lay of the village, in case I may some day guide a command up here."

"It will be useful to be posted."

So saying he continued his walk until he had crossed the better part of the village, and then began to turn his steps for the starting point.

With one less acquainted with studying topography than Buffalo Bill, the village would have been bewildering; but he had picked out his landmarks, and was not long

in finding his way back to the lone tepee he had first seen in entering the lines.

The family had turned in for sleep, for he saw no one, only an ugly looking dog made a rush at him, his instinct telling him that which the Indians had not discovered, that there was an enemy in the camp.

A stern command to the dog did no good, and to fire a shot would simply arouse the village and betray him.

The dog was a savage one, and very large, and recognizing Buffalo Bill as a foe in disguise in the Indian village, he rushed fiercely at him.

Quickly Buffalo Bill whipped out his bowie, and as the dog sprang at his throat impaled him upon it, the blade piercing the heart.

Buffalo Bill dared not leave the dead dog there, so he grasped him in his arms, and folding his blanket once more about him strode on at a rapid pace.

When he at last reached the starting point he found that he was the first of the three to arrive.

He wrapped the dog in his blanket, to let no trace of blood fall upon the ground, and then stood gazing at the picturesque scene spread out before him.

There along the valley for miles lay the village, the lights from a hundred camp-fires visible.

But all was still now, save the vicious barking of Indian dogs who seemed to scent danger in the air, or know by instinct that harm had befallen one of their kind.

In spite of his danger, Buffalo Bill enjoyed the scene, and was standing with folded arms lost in deep meditation, when with no sound of a footfall being heard, he heard a voice at his side.

In an instant his hand fell upon his knife, and when he turned he grasped the hilt.

It was a Sioux brave, and he carried a string of game hung across his shoulder.

The quick glance of Buffalo Bill showed that the Sioux was alone, and, as he had wrapped his blanket about the dog, he could not hide his face and of course his mustache and imperial would betray him, with his growth of beard for days.

Once the warrior saw his face, and in spite of the war-paint and the darkness he would know that he stood in the presence of a white man playing Indian.

Under the circumstances there was but one thing to do, and the scout did it.

He turned quickly toward the unsuspecting red-skin, and while his left hand grasped his throat in a grip that prevented any outcry or sound, his right drove his knife hard against his side, and the blade sunk deep and did its fatal work.

Gently the scout laid the Indian upon the blanket enveloped dog, for the relaxed muscles told him that he was dead, and hearing a step behind him he turned quickly to face any new danger that threatened.

CHAPTER LI.

A PRISONER.

WHEN Buffalo Bill turned to confront the one whose step he had heard close at hand, he was nerved for whatever danger he might have to face.

To his great relief though he heard the words, as he saw two forms approaching:

"Is it you, Bill, or an Indian?"

"I'm on hand, Frank, but that is not Scalp Taker with you?"

"No, it is a gentleman whose company I was forced to keep.

"I've got him bound and gagged, you see."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Look there!"

The scout pointed to the heap at his feet.

"Ah! a dead Sioux?"

"Yes."

"Two of them?"

"No, the other is a dog, but I have got him blanketed, to keep him from leaving red stains that would look ugly by daylight.

"The savage brute attacked me, and I caught him on my knife; but, you hear the mourning the rest of the canines are keeping up for him."

"Yes, they scent danger; but, we have more on our hands than we wish."

"Yes, a dead Indian, a dead dog and a prisoner."

"We will have a picnic carrying them, so let us get away before we have to take the whole tribe along."

"Have you seen Scalp Taker?"

"Not a photograph of him."

"It will not do for us to remain here, for we will make slow time with this funeral procession."

"You bet we will, too, and we had better move before we become chief mourners, for Scalp Taker, not finding us, will pull for camp."

"Yes that was our understanding."

"But, I'll strap the dog to this prisoner, and we will shoulder the dead Injun between us, if we can find a pole to swing him on."

A pole was soon found, one that had served as a tepee-pole, and wrapping the Indian's blanket around him, the scout and surgeon bound him so that each should bear equal weight.

The dog was made fast on the prisoner's back, and the latter was then made to walk between the two scouts and then they moved on.

It was slow and tiresome work, strong men that they were, and Surgeon Powell asked, after a couple of miles had been gone over:

"Bill, do you remember that we passed around a narrow shelf of rock?"

"Yes, it is not far from here."

"Scalp Taker said there was a small river at its base, and that it flowed very rapidly?"

"Yes."

"How about this dog going over there for a cruise?"

"Frank, it is the dog's jumping-off place."

"And the red-skin?"

"Well, I'd rather bury him, but graves are great tell-tales, and we would be late in reaching the camp, if we carried him."

"Well, let us send him after the dog, for this is no time to take chances."

"No, the Injun goes after the dog."

The cliff soon came in sight, and a halt was made, the dog unstrapped from the prisoner's back, unrolled from the blanket and swung over into space.

The stream was heard far below, rushing rapidly along, and the plunge of the dog's body reached the ears of the two men.

"Good! he did not fall upon the rocks, so we must toss the Indian the same way, Frank."

"Yes, but let us wrap him in his blanket."

This was done and the body was thrown off over the cliff and went downward out of sight into the darkness and depths below.

The loud splash was heard as the body struck the water, and just then the prisoner made a sudden bound to escape, for he seemed to fear that he would be the next one thrown over.

But he was not quick enough, as Buffalo Bill tripped him and he fell heavily, while, but for the scout's firm grasp upon him he would also have gone over the cliff.

"Good! I had not suspected him of that clever move, Bill, though I should have looked for it."

"It is fortunate you tripped him or he would have gone, sure, and we would have had to get out of this, as by daybreak we would have had a thousand warriors upon our track."

"You bet we would; but he is safe now, and we will move on rapidly with him, for day will break in an hour, and it will take us all of that to reach camp."

So, with the prisoner between them they moved on once more, forcing him to keep their rapid gait.

CHAPTER LII.

THE SURGEON-SCOUT'S STORY.

THE Sioux prisoner was gagged, so could not speak, and Surgeon Powell knew how to place a gag so that it would admit of the person giving no sound.

That the Indian was greatly alarmed there was no doubt, but he did as he was told, and seemed to accept the fate in store for him stoically.

On pushed the two men with their prisoner, never minding their own fatigue and only anxious to get to the camp.

They wondered why Scalp Taker did not overtake them, for he was noted as a runner and knew the trails so well he did not have to hesitate as they frequently had to do to find their way.

Day had dawned when at last they entered their camp in the canyon.

Buttons had been astir early, in his anxiety for his chief and Surgeon Powell, and had the Pawnees all up.

As they came into camp it was at first supposed that the prisoner was Scalp Taker; but this was soon seen to be a mistake and all gathered around the Sioux.

Then the surgeon removed the gag from his mouth, but kept his arms tied as before, and said to him:

"We will do you no harm if you behave yourself d do as we tell you."

His f ere then bound together, so that he could run off, and he was given some water to drink, as Doctor Powell well knew how his mouth must feel after having a large silk handkerchief forced in it and tied there for several hours.

The Sioux prisoner made no reply, drank the water given him and seemed relieved, while the Pawnees appeared greatly interested in the gag which had so long kept him quiet.

The Red Ropers looked as though they would enjoy turning him loose, catching him with their lassoes and then scalping him.

Buttons soon had breakfast ready, and the tired scouts ate with a relish, the prisoner being also tempted to dispose of a good meal.

But both Buffalo Bill and the Fighting Surgeon were most anxious regarding the non-appearance of Scalp Taker.

They explained to Buttons and the Pawnees, just how they had divided, and when Buffalo Bill had told of his walk through the part of the village he had reconnoitered, what he had heard in the Council Lodge, the killing of the savage dog, and then how he had been forced to take the life of the Sioux, he said:

"Now, Frank, what of your reconnoitering expedition, for I have not had a chance to ask you?"

"I went into the village between two tepees where there appeared to be a happy family reunion, for they were having a good time."

"This Indian prisoner here called to me to come to the tepee, but as I was seeking no new acquaintances I went on without thanking him for his invitation."

"I soon after got into the thick of the village, and a miserable cur began to follow and snap at my heels until I gave him a pain by a kick in the ribs."

"I began to fear the dogs would betray me, so many of them did I meet, and they seemed to know that I was sailing under false colors."

"But I went among a crowd of red-skins and got rid of the pups, after which I was wishing to steer clear of Indians and dogs too."

"In knocking about the camp I could find no trace of where the tepee for prisoners was, and fearing, as there were a number of red-skins roving about for so late an hour, I might yet be detected, I concluded to start back to the meeting-place, going by another trail."

"This I did, and I was just passing the last of the tepees when I saw the prisoner here."

"He was on his way to his tepee, I judge, but seeing me doubtless recognized me as the one who had slighted his invitation to join him."

"At any rate he called to me."

"I walked on and he came after me."

"I quickened my steps, and then he came at a run, determined to see who I was, and evidently thinking I was some one he knew well playing it on him."

"When I got down into a gully, and away from the tepees, I turned and drove my fist into his face and down he went stunned."

"Then I held him by the throat with one hand and tied his hands behind him with the other, forcing the gag into his mouth as I saw that he was reviving and would tune up for help."

"Well, I brought him on with me then, Bill, and that is all there is of it, but I hope that no harm has befallen the Scalp Taker."

CHAPTER LIII.

MISSING.

THE day passed away and nothing was seen of the Pawnee warrior Scalp Taker.

Expecting that they would have to be up again all night, both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell went to sleep soon after breakfast, and left the prisoner to the care of Buttons and the Pawnees.

It was late in the afternoon when they awoke, and they looked worried when Buttons told them that Scalp Taker had not appeared.

Then they decided to have a talk with the prisoner, and Buffalo Bill hit upon a clever way of getting all the information out of him that was obtainable.

The prisoner was a young warrior who appeared to stand well as a Sioux, to judge from his own account of himself told to Buttons.

He recognized both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, having seen them before on several occasions, and he had been in the attack on the scout when the surgeon had frightened his band off, and also in the three defeats the Sioux had met with afterward.

He was willing to sound his own praises and Buttons had encouraged him to talk, but intimated that he supposed that he would be put to death.

When Buffalo Bill took him in hand to question him he asked him if he was not a chief.

The red-skin was sorry to confess that he was not, yet hoped to be some day in the near future.

Then the scout asked his name, and was told that it was "Talk-too-much."

"I hope you'll talk all you wish," said Buffalo Bill, and then he went on to tell him that they had come there into the Indian country for the sole purpose of rescuing some friends the Indians had taken prisoners at the Battle of Hermit Pass.

Watching the face of the Indian they could see a certain expression upon it that neither of the scouts could fathom.

"Those friends are now in the Sioux camp," continued Buffalo Bill.

"And if your brother braves will give them up to us, we will return you in their place."

This was the tact Buffalo Bill had taken to find out about Frank Fenton and his companions, and now encouraged to talk, the prisoner said that there were no prisoners in the Sioux village taken at the fight of Hermit Pass.

"Were they put to death?" asked the scout.

"No."

"What was done with them?"

"None were taken there," was the answer.

"Did not the Sioux have any white captives in their village?"

"Not one."

"This about coincides with what I heard the chief say in the Council Lodge," remarked Buffalo Bill to the Fighting Surgeon.

"Yes; can it be possible that we are on a false trail, Bill?"

"I hope not, for I had hopes that Fenton was alive."

"He certainly was not among the dead on the field, nor were Bostwick and Corbett."

"No, and their horses were not found, so they must have been captured."

"But by whom?"

"Perhaps Sioux from elsewhere than this village were in the fight, and carried them off."

"Ask the Sioux."

The question was asked and the answer was that the Sioux from the village alone were in the fights.

"Well, we must wait for Scalp Taker and see if he will turn up."

"And if not take the back trail?"

"Yes, for we are on a false scent after Fenton in this village I verily believe."

The prisoner was asked other questions as to his chance to know if there were white prisoners in the village, but his answers

proved that he was in a position to know all that took place in the tribe.

That night Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell again started for the Indian village.

They did not intend to enter it, but they wished to see if they could find Scalp Taker in any way, or discover if he had been killed or captured by the Sioux.

They went rapidly over the trail and reached the spot where they had parted with the Indian, thinking that he might have misunderstood the place to meet them, and was in hiding near waiting for them.

But Scalp Taker was not visible, nor did he put in an appearance as they waited.

The village seemed more quiet than it had been the night before, and yet neither Cody nor Powell wished the other to make the venture of the previous night, though each one was willing to go and reconnoiter if the other would wait there for his return.

But this neither would hear to, and after remaining until midnight they started upon their return to the camp.

"If they have caught Scalp Taker, missed young Talk-too-much, or failed to find the Indian and dog I killed, it has all acted upon them like a dose of soothing syrup, for the village is as quiet as a graveyard to-night."

"Yes, Bill, and speaking of graveyards let us get away from here," and they walked rapidly back upon the trail to the secret camp in the canyon.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE SCALP TAKER.

ANOTHER day of rest for the two friends, another night's tramp to the place where they had last seen the Scalp Taker, and still no sign of him.

When the third night had passed in the same way, Buffalo Bill said:

"We will go again to-night, Frank, and if he does not show up, we must start upon the back trail."

"I think so, Bill."

"We are now doubtful as to Fenton and his comrades having been captured, and we have certainly done our duty in coming here to look for them, for the chances were a hundred to one that we turned up our toes to the daisies."

"Yes."

"Now Scalp Taker has doubtless parted company with his scalp, poor fellow, and if he does not meet us to night we will start on the trail out of this country."

"Whatever you say I am with you."

So once more the two friends took up the long tramp for the place which they had now visited four nights in succession, in the hope of finding the Scalp Taker.

They had just reached the rendezvous, and were gazing at the lights of the Indian village, when, from their hiding-place they saw two forms approaching.

"Shall we hold them up, Doc?"

"Not unless they fall upon us, for we have one more Indian now than we want, Bill."

"You are right," and as the scout spoke the two forms halted.

"One's a squaw, Bill."

"Sure."

They were not fifteen feet away, and were conversing in a low tone, as they halted and turned toward the village, apparently interested in the view of the lights of the camp-fires.

Then the two came forward again and Buffalo Bill whispered:

"Frank, it is the Scalp Taker."

The two forms were now facing the hiding-place of the parads, and one said in the Sioux tongue:

"Now we must hurry on, for if my white brothers believe that I have been killed and have gone, the Fawn Eyes will have to return to her tepee, for she cannot walk, and the Scalp Taker must come for her again."

"A love affair, or I'm a saint," muttered Cody to himself, and then he said aloud:

"Your pale-face brothers have not left you, Scalp Taker."

Both Indians turned quickly, the woman uttering a slight exclamation of alarm, while Scalp Taker dropped his hand upon his knife to be on the defensive.

But the words told him who had uttered

them, and Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell at once stepped out and confronted them.

"The Scalp Taker is glad to see his white brothers, for he feared they had gone far away, as he did not come back."

"But the Scalp Taker loved a little maiden, whose father is a Sioux chief, and her mother a Pawnee captive."

"He left her here when he escaped from the Sioux, and he met her when he came the other night."

"She is the Fawn Eyes, and she hid the Scalp Taker in the tepee of her father, for her mother is dead."

"The Scalp Taker has heard all that the white chief would know, and he started to-night on their trail, the Fawn Eyes going with him to see if they had gone."

"If they were gone, the Fawn Eyes was to come back to her people, but if the Scalp Taker found the white chiefs waiting for him, he wished them to take the Fawn Eyes with them that she may go to the Pawnee village with the Scalp Taker."

The Indian ceased speaking.

He had told his story and pleaded his cause.

The Sioux maiden stood silent and with face downcast.

"It is the same old story, Doc, whether in palace or hovel, army post or Indian camp, the story of love."

"Yes, Bill, you know how it is yourself, so don't be hard on the girl and take her along."

"You bet I will," and turning to the Scalp Taker the scout said:

"The Fawn Eyes is welcome, and can go with the Scalp Taker; but let us go at once, for if the Scalp Taker has not found the white prisoners in the Sioux camps, we must start on the back trail to-night."

"The Scalp Taker knows that the white braves are not in the Sioux village."

"The Sioux took no prisoners in the late battles, and know nothing of the three pale-face braves."

"The Fawn Eyes can tell them with a straight tongue, for she knows."

"That is just the conclusion we had come to, Scalp Taker, from what we had found out."

"You have done well, however, and I am glad that you have captured a Sioux prisoner in the Fawn Eyes."

"Now let us be off."

They started at a brisk pace, and the Fawn Eyes never once showed fatigue, and they reached camp in time to get started on the back trail a couple of hours before the dawn day.

CHAPTER LV.

THE HERMIT OF THE PASS.

THE Fawn Eyes had come prepared to elope with Scalp Taker, provided the party had not left the camp, believing him dead, and there was a way for her to go.

If Buffalo Bill had gone with his party, then the Scalp Taker was to go into hiding until the Fawn Eyes could get two of her father's best ponies and join her lover with them.

That was the arrangement according to Scalp Taker, and when the sunlight revealed the Fawn Eyes, she was seen to be a very pretty girl, that is as far as the beauty of Indian girls go, which is limited.

She was young, graceful and plucky.

She had put her trousseau in a blanket and brought it with her, carrying the bundle herself all the way from the village to the camp, for, though a lover, Scalp Taker being a warrior could not lower his dignity by bearing a burden.

The gallantry of both Powell and Cody had made them offer to carry it, but Fawn Eyes declined, and they fell from grace in her eyes for being willing to carry a bundle.

A pack-horse was given to the red-skin maiden, and she seemed perfectly at home in the saddle, and appeared to consider the giving up of her father and people for Scalp Taker a very fair exchange.

The Scalp Taker acted as guide on the retreat, and Buffalo Bill told him that they wished to leave the Sioux country by way of the Hermit's Pass, so he bore away in that direction.

The reason for going by that trail was that both Surgeon Powell and Cody were

anxious to go carefully over the field and see if any trace could be found of Private Fenton or his comrades.

"There used to be, some years ago, an old hermit living near the pass, but I believe the Sioux killed him, for no one has reported seeing him within the past year," said the scout, and Surgeon Powell rejoined:

"Yes, I have heard of him.

"Some said he was a settler who had lost his family, massacred by the Indians, and others reported that he was a gold-hunter, prospecting for gold; but of late I never heard of him.

"Do you know where his home was?"

"No; but Scalp Taker may know of him."

Scalp Taker was asked about the old hermit, but could only say that the Indians knew of such a man, and shunned him as an evil spirit.

He had lived near the pass, he said, and that fact had given the canyon the name of Hermit's Pass.

"Well, we will look up his cabin," was the decision of Buffalo Bill, and he felt very sure, with the Red-skin Ropers along as trailers, they could find the home of the old hermit.

It was the afternoon of the day after leaving their camp near the Sioux village that they drew near the Hermit's Pass, having come by trails which Scalp-Taker knew well, up to within an hour's ride of the pass.

As they neared the canyon, Buffalo Bill was riding in advance and Surgeon Powell was by his side, when the former suddenly called out:

"Halt!"

The cause of this sudden command was at discovering standing upon a rock a short distance away the form of a man.

He was a white man, with long, wavy hair and beard, dressed in buckskin of his own make and tanning, and wearing moccasins and a fur cap.

He was a man of large stature, carried a belt of arms, rusty with age, and a rifle with long barrel.

He gazed fixedly at Buffalo Bill and said, in a deep voice, as though it was the most common thing in the world to meet people in that locality:

"Good-evening, pards."

"I hope I see you well?"

"You do, pard, and we were hoping to find the Hermit of this pass."

"Don't look any further."

"Are you the man?"

"I know of no one else who lives alone in these wilds."

"I have heard of you, but supposed you were dead, killed by the Indians, as no one has seen you the past year."

"No, I'm a rather healthy dead man, as you see, though it may not be long before I do turn up my toes, and I cannot complain, as I have lived my three-score years and ten."

"Why live here?"

"Well, I came here years ago with a comrade, looking for gold.

"He struck it rich one day, and we were to go to his find the next morning.

"But the Sioux attacked our home that night and killed him.

"I never found the gold-mine, and never will, perhaps, but I shall die trying.

"If I find it, I'll go East and die in luxury."

"If I do not, I'll go out here some night like a candle, and my cabin will be my tomb.

"The Sioux don't bother me now, though I've got a lariat made of their scalps, for I have avenged my poor pard Ben, avenged him ten times over.

"You are Buffalo Bill, are you not?"

"Yes, men so call me."

"I saw you at Kearney, years ago, and only once.

"But you have not a face to forget, and you are one to keep your name known by your deeds.

"Who is your pard?"

"Surgeon Frank Powell, of the army.

"He is another man to see and remember.

"I saw you both not long ago in the fight at the pass and I rejoiced at the whipping you gave the Sioux, for it was another blow to avenge Ben.

"But I am forgetting my manners, so

come to my cabin, for such as it is you are welcome, you and your outfit.

"Follow me," and the old Hermit led the way at a pace that belied his assertion that he was seventy years of age.

CHAPTER LVI.

SURPRISING INFORMATION.

THE Pawnees gazed with a kind of superstitious dread at the white-haired and bearded old man, who walked at a pace that was swift and apparently no effort to him.

He turned into a narrow canyon leading into the mountain range, and coming to where he had killed a deer and hung it in a tree on his way out, he slung it upon his shoulders and strode on, declining the offer of Buffalo Bill to carry it on a pack-horse.

"It is nothing, so don't spoil me by lightening my load," he said, as he strode on.

The canyon grew wilder as they advanced, and at last narrowed to a picturesque and wild bit of scenery, with towering cliffs almost shutting out the light of day.

But there was a stout log cabin perched upon the rocks, and by the door flowed a stream that fell in a crystal mass from a cliff near by.

The cabin had two rooms in it, a porch with roof of woven grass, and commanded a fine view down the canyon, while beyond there there was no passing.

To one side of the cabin was a grave, covered with wild flowers, and at the head of it was a board in which had been cut:

"PARD BEN.

"Killed by the Sioux, but avenged ten-fold."

There was a rustic easy-chair on each side of the porch, and one doubtless had been Pard Ben's.

Within was visible a rude table, bench, some cooking utensils and a bed, that was all.

"This is my home, so welcome, pards.

"There's grass plenty in the canyon for your horses, wood for fires, and I have fresh meat and some vegetables, for I have a garden down the valley.

"Water is plenty and I drink nothing else, for I hav'n't got it.

"Here is fresh deer meat, so help yourselves, and there's plenty for the Pawnees, too, for I feel kindly toward them as they hate the Sioux."

"May I ask your name, sir?" said Buffalo Bill, who, with Surgeon Powell, was deeply interested in the strange man.

"Lord, man, what's in a name?

"It's been so long since I heard mine that I've about forgotten it, so just call me Hermit and that fits me.

"But what are you doing with that small force coming out of the Sioux country, Buffalo Bill, for they are in no happy mood after the whipping you gave them.

"Why, I thought they had had more than they wanted down there at the pass, when all of a sudden one day, I saw them going on the war-path with about all their warriors.

"It was too late for me to warn you, and two days later I found there was no need of it, for they tore through the pass back to their camp, wild with rage and howling like mad.

"Then I knew they had bitten off more than they could chew, and I had a good laugh at them, and picked off a straggler or two myself, for my Sioux scalp lariat was not quite long enough, and I'm adding a foot or so more for poor Pard Ben."

"Where were you the day of the fight in the pass?"

"Looking on, from a hiding-place I have and dropping in a piece of lead now and then for Pard Ben's sake; but that reminds me to ask if you accounted for all your soldiers that day?"

"No, we did not."

"You found all your dead and wounded?"

"Yes."

"Any missing?"

"Yes, and we have been on a scout hoping to be able to rescue them from the Sioux."

"How many?"

"There were three soldiers."

"A young man, handsome as a picture,

and two others who couldn't brag on their good looks?"

"Yes, did you see them?" eagerly asked Buffalo Bill.

"I did."

"When?"

"The evening after the fight."

"Where were they?"

"Going south."

"Alone?"

"Only the three."

"Do you mean that they deserted the command?" was the question of Surgeon Powell.

"Now, that is what I would like to know."

"We supposed they were taken prisoners, as I said, by the Sioux."

"Well, they were not."

Buffalo Bill glanced at Surgeon Powell and then asked:

"Tell us, please, my Hermit pard, what you know about those three men?"

"I know one of them to be a villain, though he has never wronged me.

"It was years ago when I knew him, and he was a wild boy then, and his life of dissipation and extravagance ended in his ruining his brother, for he committed a crime which his good brother, years older than he was, had to stand trial for.

"They could not prove his guilt, so he was set free, and went away a ruined man, under a cloud, and what became of him Heaven only knows, but his wicked brother was the guilty one as I afterward found out, and I saw him the other day in the uniform of a soldier, and having with him one pard of his stripe in appearance, and a young man who was in irons."

"In irons?"

"Yes, Buffalo Bill, his hands were manacled and fastened to his saddle."

"My God, Cody, what does that mean?" cried Surgeon Powell excitedly.

"I hope our Hermit friend here can explain it?"

"I'm afraid not, for I saw them from my hiding-place, and they halted within a few yards of me.

"The young man was ironed, as I said, and I know the other two had him in their charge, and at first I supposed he was a deserter, or had done some wrong.

"Then I recognized Bostwick, the man I told you of, and I heard him say:

"It's no use asking questions or kicking, for we have orders to take you to Mission San Juan, and there you will learn all you wish to know, I suppose, so ask no more questions."

"That was all I heard, pards, and then they rode on; but the more I thought of it, the more certain I was that the young soldier was not the sinner of the trio.

"When the Indians had gone, I took the trail of the three soldiers the day after, and followed it until I saw that it led to the old trail down into New Mexico, and then I came back, and I can give you no other information."

"There is no need of more, for now we know that Frank Fenton has been the victim of some conspiracy of those two men," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER LVII.

A LONG, LONE TRAIL.

THE words of the Hermit of the Pass, impressed Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell deeply.

They decided that they had heard enough to cause them to consider well what was best to be done, so the Red-skin Ropers were sent into camp down the canyon, and Buttons joined them and the Hermit at the latter's cabin and the whole story was gone over again.

As night was coming on they broke off conversation to have supper, after which the four sat down in front of the cabin and began to discuss over again the fact that the Hermit knew Bostwick as a villain in the past, one who had allowed his brother to be tried for a crime he was guilty of, and certainly had not improved in later years.

The fact that he and Corbett had enlisted together half a year before, coming to the fort alone to do so, and stating that they were miners, and were never seen apart,

while both were unpopular in the command, was a suspicious circumstance.

Then it was recalled by Surgeon Powell that the two men had seemed to constantly dog the steps of Private Fenton, and when he had dashed away in pursuit of an Indian chief in the battle of the pass, they had followed him.

The Hermit had seen them an hour after, a mile from the pass, and then Fenton was in irons, and the two men evidently self-constituted guards.

They had made the remark that they had orders to take him to Mission San Juan, and there all information ended, save that the Hermit stated that Private Fenton's head was bleeding from a wound.

"Well, Frank, what do you make out of all this?" asked Buffalo Bill when all had been told.

"I take it that the two men knew Fenton—that they enlisted in the army for the purpose of getting him in their power, and cleverly did so the day of the battle of the pass.

"Whether they are acting for themselves or for some one else is only conjecture. So it is as to their motive. We can only conjecture as to it."

"You are on just the trail I am. That those men wanted Fenton for a purpose, and they plotted to kidnap him and have done so, I think is certain."

"Now where is this Mission San Juan?"

"I can tell you, for I passed there once, as taking the trail which the Hermit says they did it must be the same one. San Juan is in New Mexico, all of two hundred miles from here, Bill."

"Were it a thousand I would go there."

"Do you mean it, Bill?"

"Indeed I do, for I am on Fenton's trail to stay, and I shall see the end of it; but you cannot go, for you are needed at the fort?"

"Yes, I must return, that is certain."

"And you too, Buttons, must go back to the fort and command the scouts in my place."

"I will, sir, but I would like to go with you."

"No, I cannot take any one without the colonel's permission, and it would now require too long to get that, as you know."

"But you will take the Red-skin Ropers, Chief Cody?"

"No, Buttons; they must go back, too, for I would not dare lead them down into New Mexico."

"You must not go alone, Bill, so take the chief, Sioux Slayer, or Scalp Taker at least," Surgeon Powell urged.

"I believe I will," thoughtfully answered Buffalo Bill.

"Scalp Taker I would like best to have along, as the chief must return with his Lasso-Throwers; but I fear Scalp Taker would not wish to leave his Fawn Eyes."

"Ask him, for my idea is that he is more anxious to win a name than anything else. She can go on to the Pawnee village with the Red-skin Ropers and await his return."

On that suggestion of Surgeon Powell, Buttons went after Scalp Taker, and upon his coming back with him the Indian was asked if he would go with the scout, leaving Fawn Eyes to go on with the braves and go to the tepee of his mother to await his return?

Scalp Taker was ambitious so at once said he would go, for to accompany Buffalo Bill alone he knew meant fame for him.

"That settles it. Scalp Taker goes with me, Frank, and we start to-morrow, for the Hermit will put us right, I know."

"Oh, yes; and when you come back by here I expect to see Bostwick wearing the bracelets, for you will get him, Buffalo Bill, as I know your style of doing things."

"There is one thing, Frank, and that is about the Sioux prisoner."

"Yes, I shall allow him to escape—you see to it, Buttons for the Pawnees will wish to take him to their village and torture him to death."

"And that must not be."

"By no means."

"I will see that he escapes to-night, sir," promised Buttons.

And so the matter was settled.

That night the Sioux prisoner did escape, and it was hard to keep the Red-skin Ropers from taking his trail in the morning.

But Surgeon Powell called the braves to-

gether for the start on the trail to the fort; and, after a long conversation with Buffalo Bill, the two parted with a warm grasp of the hand.

Buffalo Bill and Scalp Taker watched them until they were out of sight. Then they followed the Hermit, who went to put them upon the trail of the two soldiers who had their comrade in irons.

Half an hour after, accompanied by Scalp Taker, and with a pack-horse in lead, Buffalo Bill started upon the long trail to find Private Fenton—the longest trail of his eventful life.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE FIGHTING SURGEON'S RETURN.

THE suspense at Fort Ready was becoming most intense for the safety of Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, Buttons, and the Pawnee Ropers.

Somehow it had leaked out, for there is always a leak where a number of persons have a secret, that Buffalo Bill had gone to try and rescue Private Frank Fenton from the Sioux.

Of course, when this became known there was the greatest dread felt for the result.

All knew Cody, and that he clung to a trail he had once started upon like grim death.

They could realize the great peril of the undertaking, in his invading the Indian country even with a large force, and they really enlarged upon the dangers until it became an assured thing in their minds that they could never get back, any one of them.

Doctor Powell was one of the most popular officers at the fort. All liked him, all admired him.

The ladies found in him a sincere friend, while the children were devoted to him as he was to them. He was never so happy as when with them.

Among his brother officers he was regarded as the prince of good fellows, generous to a fault, brave, self sacrificing and ever ready to do a good turn.

The men had the same high appreciation of him, also. To them "Doctor Frank" was everything—physician, friend, adviser.

As for Buttons he was a jovial good fellow, ever in good humor and always ready for a fight or foot-race or a funeral, whichever it might be.

The Red-skin Ropers also came in for their share of sympathy from those at the post; and were it true that they were wiped out by the Sioux it was feared the blow might be a severe set back to further alliance with the pale-faces.

So far all had gone one way, the pale-faces had been the victors; but, with a very severe defeat, might not the Pawnees regret an alliance which had wrought only dire disaster?

Such was the state of feeling at the fort, when Colonel Markham sent for Major Melton, one morning, and told him that he must make another expedition into the Sioux country, while, as they now were at peace with the Pawnees, the fort would be in no danger, so he could take four-fifths of the garrison with him.

The major was just beginning to congratulate himself upon winning more victories, when, into the post, rode two horsemen.

They were Surgeon Powell and Buttons.

Where was Buffalo Bill?

Where were the devoted Pawnee "brothers" of the great scout?

Then questions flew from lip to lip, as Surgeon Powell rode straight to headquarters.

In his anxiety Colonel Markham met him at the door, and grasping his hand he said eagerly:

"Thank God you are back, Powell—but—Cody—"

"Is all right, sir, or was when I left him."

"I will tell you the story, sir, and wish to report myself for duty, though I would have given much to have gone on with Cody."

"But, duty called me here, and here I am, colonel!"

"Yes, you did right to return; but, did you come alone?"

"Buttons returned with me, sir, and the

Red-skin Ropers under their chief, Sioux Slayer, branched off for their village—all save Scalp Taker, the young Pawnee who was our guide into the Sioux country, and who is a host in himself—a matchless man, or, if he is a red-skin."

"And, pray where is he?" asked the commandant.

"He went on with Cody, sir."

"But where has Cody gone? What has happened?"

"Into New Mexico, sir, to the Mission San Juan, for we discovered that Private Fenton and the others were not captured by the Sioux."

"It is better if they had been killed outright, than live in torture."

"But, they were not killed or captured, sir."

"Did you go into the Sioux country?"

"Yes, sir; Cody, Scalp Taker and myself went into the Sioux villages disguised as Indians."

"Great heavens! Powell, you and Cody certainly bear a charmed life. How could you dare such an adventure?"

"But, what news have you of the three men, if they were not killed or captured?"

"That Bostwick and Corbett are scamps, sir, enlisted to kidnap Private Fenton, and have done so, carrying him a prisoner into New Mexico."

"This we learned from the old Hermit of the Pass, of whom so much has been heard, yet so little known."

"We all thought he was dead, but he is very much alive, and he it was who saw Fenton in irons, the prisoner of his two soldier comrades."

Then Surgeon Powell told the whole story of the expedition to the astonished commandant.

CHAPTER LIX.

ON THE TRACK OF THE KIDNAPPERS.

BUFFALO BILL and Scalp Taker were put upon the trail of the three soldiers by the old Hermit of the Pass.

They found that there were four horses which made the trail. This would indicate that they had been joined by some one else, or that the two kidnappers had prepared for the flight, and so had caught an extra horse in the confusion of the battle to serve as a pack-animal, or relief.

When the Hermit had seen them there were but the three men and their three horses.

There was the sign of a halt near, which indicated that doubtless, one of the soldiers had gone back for the extra animal, leaving the other and their prisoner there, for the trail of the fourth animal came in from another direction.

That was the way that Buffalo Bill had read the signs. The old Hermit agreed with him; and when Scalp Taker had it explained to him he was of the same opinion and so expressed himself.

Buffalo Bill then bade the Hermit goodbye, thanked him for his kindness and rode on his way with Scalp Taker, the pack-horse following.

Though it had been some time, since the trail had been made, there had been no rain and the trails here and there were visible, Buffalo Bill taking his idea of which they would go from the nature of the country.

Then too his definite point was the Mission San Juan, and he had been directed by Surgeon Powell, who knew that part of the country, just where it was situated.

Buffalo Bill also had been on expeditions down into New Mexico several times, so was not unacquainted with the country and the people.

He was well aware that, at that time, the two men could readily carry a prisoner through the country upon any pretense whatever, and he did not doubt but that they would safely reach their destination with Private Fenton.

The young soldier, however, he well knew was not one to submit tamely, and they would find him no easy prisoner to get along with.

That they had gotten him into a trap, through treachery, Buffalo Bill felt assured, as they would have found him more than a match for both of them in an open encounter.

The scout made a good ride of it the first day, placing forty miles behind them, and camping early he gave the horses a long rest.

The next day it was a ride of fifty miles, and still here and there he came upon the trail he was following, though at times they lost it for miles at a time.

The third day placed sixty miles behind them, and they had begun to come now into a country where, occasionally, there was an adobe ranch, with a few cattle feeding near it.

The scout spoke Spanish enough to make himself understood, and claimed to be carrying dispatches to one of the lower forts.

He learned that two soldiers had passed, at the time he estimated that they should have been there, also going to the lower forts.

One of the soldiers had gone crazy, his comrades explained, and they were sent to take him to an old mission where he had a brother who was a priest.

At first Buffalo Bill was startled at this report of poor Fenton; then he realized that it was a part of the treacherous plot, for, by declaring Fenton to be crazy, no attention would be paid to anything he said to those whom they met on the trail.

Taking down the time that the three men had passed that ranch, Buffalo Bill also learned that one of them wore a non-commissioned officer's stripes on his fatigue uniform, and that they had with them a pack-horse, which accounted for the track of the fourth horse.

The sergeant had not said that one of the men was a sergeant, and as both Bostwick and Corbett were privates, it was certain that one of them had stolen a uniform of a sergeant for effect.

That he was on the right track, and in coming up with the fugitive kidnappers of Private Fenton, he would unearth some deep mystery and cruel treachery, the scout now began to feel assured.

It was on the fourth day that Buffalo Bill found that he would reach San Juan Mission before sunset, and he said as at last the adobe walls came in sight far in the distance:

"Scalp Taker, we will play a little game of bluff, too, so we will be prepared, for those fellows may be there at the Mission."

CHAPTER LX.

THE MISSION SAN JUAN.

As Buffalo Bill and Scalp Taker neared the Mission they came upon a Mexican cowboy, watching a band of cattle.

He was a small, dark-faced, hard-looking fellow, and he glanced at the scout as he came up with the look of one who though dwelling upon American soil hated those who were in authority over him.

Riding up to him Buffalo Bill spoke courteously, and asked if he was from the Mission on ahead.

He replied sullenly in the affirmative, and then the scout asked who lived there.

"Senor Miguel Mora."

"Was it not a Mission now?"

"No, but it had been years before, but now it was nearly a ruin, and Senor Mora was not often there."

"Who was there now?"

"Some visitors, awaiting the return of the senor."

"How many?"

"Two American soldiers and a madman."

"Did he, the cowboy live there?"

"He did."

"Could he, the scout and the Indian be accommodated there?"

"He would have to ask the man in charge who, with his wife, cared for the place for Senor Mora."

With this Buffalo Bill rode on, but went slowly so as to reach the Mission after night-fall.

He found it to be a large rambling, mixed adobe and stone structure, as strong as a fortress and quite a formidable abiding-place for the religious order that had once made it their home.

But the main building was almost a ruin, save one end of it where the senor lived when he was there, and his servants had their quarters.

As they rode up to the massive gate in the

wall that surrounded the structure, Buffalo Bill saw a man standing there and who had evidently been watching their approach.

He spoke pleasantly to him and asked if he could remain all night with his Indian prisoner, explaining that he was a scout from the lower forts, who had been sent to the northwest on the trail of an Indian who had killed an officer at the fort and escaped.

"I am a Government officer, and I will pay you handsomely for our accommodations, only I must ask you to give us a hiding-place, and keep our presence here a secret, as if the Indians got knowledge of the capture of the man with him they would rescue him."

"It shall be worth your while, senor, to do all you can for me, and not let a soul know of our presence here."

"I must let my wife know."

"How about her keeping the secret?"

"She'll do it, for she is a woman who never talks."

"I should like to see her," dryly said Buffalo Bill; but the Mexican did not of course appreciate the wit of desiring to see a woman who could not talk.

"Is there any one else in the Mission?" asked the scout.

"There are two soldiers here with a comrade who is mad. They have to keep him in irons, and watch him very closely."

"When do they leave?"

"They are awaiting the coming of Senor Mora, and have been here for some time, so will remain until his return."

"They know the senor, then?"

"Oh, yes; they are friends of his, and the madman is related to him, I hear."

"All right. Do not even let them know that I am here with this Indian. Here is a reminder that your wife shall have the match to this when I leave."

Buffalo Bill took from his pocket a ten-dollar gold-piece and handed it to the Mexican, who was delighted with the generosity of the fine-appearing stranger, and happy at the thought that his wife would receive an equal sum from him.

Quickly he led the way into one of the wings of the mansion, and said:

"It is near the rooms of the soldiers, senor, but make no noise and they will not know you are here."

"I will look to your horses, and then bring you a light."

"I'll first make the Indian secure, and I have some fresh meat your wife can cook for supper for us, and for your other guests too, and also some of the finest coffee you ever drank."

"Suppose I slip into the kitchen and give your wife her gold-piece, so as to keep her in a good humor."

The Mexican believed that a bird in the hand was worth a whole covey on the prairie, so, wanting to secure the money, he led Buffalo Bill at once to the kitchen, where was his wife just getting ready to prepare supper for her guests.

But for the gold-piece, she would have been in ill-humor at the addition of two others, but the money caused her to smile sweetly and warmly welcome the handsome scout, who quickly explained the situation and the necessity for secrecy.

He told her that the Indian was chained to a bolt in the room he had left, and he was anxious to aid her in getting supper.

So he got his fresh venison and birds, killed that afternoon, and a string of fresh fish caught at the noonday camp.

He also got out his coffee, and was so polite and useful that the woman was charmed with him and allowed him to aid her, while her husband was out looking after the horses.

As soon as supper was ready, the woman took it in to her soldier guests, while Buffalo Bill carried his and Scalp Taker's into the room where the Indian was awaiting him, his hands manacled together.

"We will drink no coffee, Scalp Taker, for I have doctored it; but all else goes and is good," said the scout as he set their supper down upon a table.

CHAPTER LXI.

BUFFALO BILL'S GAME OF BLUFF.

SCALP TAKER looked wistfully at the coffee, but Buffalo Bill said:

"Look not on the coffee when it is

doctored, Pard Pawnee. If you were to drink a cup of that coffee you would go to sleep and Gabriel's horn could not arouse you—no, not the war-whoops of the whole Sioux tribe, until the effects of the drug I put in it would wear off."

"Now, Doctor Powell put his medicine-case in my saddle-pocket by mistake, but it was a godsend to me when I found it and thought of putting it to use to-night."

"I am no doctor, but I prescribed enough morphine to put those soldiers to sleep to-night, and the man and his wife, too; but, I went more lightly upon the pot that the woman took in for those we are after, as they will have to travel to-night."

"I only wish I could have seen my pard Fenton to give him warning, but I could not, so he takes a nap with the others."

"That villainous-looking Dago we met out on the plain came in as I left the kitchen, so he goes to sleep also, and he will slumber as soundly as the man and his wife if he loves coffee."

"We will have to keep awake, Scalp Taker, and attend to business, but I left my keys in my saddle-pocket, so I can not unlock your irons until we go out to the horses; but, you don't mind playing bad Injun murderer for a short while longer, and you will see those same manacles upon one of those we are on the track of."

Whether Scalp Taker understood all that the scout had said to him or not, he was fully aware of the situation and had entered into Buffalo Bill's game of bluff and bra with a will.

The scout had decided to also play a game that would account for his presence there and having the Indian with him, and so he had proposed the plan to Scalp Taker to pretend that he was his prisoner.

Scalp Taker had readily agreed, and so far all had gone well.

Returning to the kitchen in a little while Buffalo Bill found the Mexican, his wife and the cowboy eating their supper, and they had just begun on the coffee, which the woman said was the finest she had ever seen.

"Yes, it's the best old Government Java, and instead of keeping one awake is most soothing to the nerves."

"How are your guests?"

"All right. They have finished their supper, and were most glad to get the coffee for she had none."

"Then they are all right," was Buffalo Bill's significant remark, and he said he wanted something more for the Indian, who had a great appetite, but would cook it himself and not disturb her.

So he put some more venison upon the fire, and then went back to the Indian, whom he led out of the room where he had been and pointed into the kitchen through the open door, while he said:

"See there, Scalp Taker."

"Yes, heap sleepy," said the Pawnee, using the few words of English that he knew.

"Yes, and getting more so."

The cowboy's light brain had been the first to feel the effects of the drug. He had gone to sleep with his head on the table.

The woman was trying to fight off her drowsiness, while her husband had risen, and was supporting himself upon his chair but seemed to be bewildered, and frightened, as well.

"A few moments more, Scalp Taker, and they will be in proper condition."

"I gave them more than I did the soldiers, so they will have a long sleep. Ah! there goes the woman's head into her plate, and the man is making for the settee to lie down. There he goes! Now all is well, and I'll take a look at their guests and our game, Scalp Taker!"

So saying Buffalo Bill entered the kitchen, followed by Scalp Taker.

He saw that the three there were fully under the influence of the potent powders from Doctor Powell's wonderful medicine, and having noted the way the woman went with the supper for the guests, he drew a revolver and went on into the wing where they were quartered.

He was not so sure that the two soldiers might be wholly under the influence of the morphine, and knowing that he would be recognized he wished to be prepared for them.

Opening the door gently he saw Bostwick asleep at his place at the table.

Lying on the settee was Corbett, while over in the corner, chained to a massive piece of furniture—the manacles still upon his ankles, though his hands had been set free for him to eat his supper—was Frank Fenton.

He, too, was unconscious, having sunk in his tracks where he stood eating his supper from off the heavy sideboard.

"Scalp Taker, my game of bluff and brace wins, and we rule the ranch!" cried Buffalo Bill with pardonable triumph, while Scalp Taker gave a war-whoop that echoed through the old mansion.

CHAPTER LXII.

ON THE BACK TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL could not censure Scalp Taker for his yell of triumph, as he felt like doing the same himself.

He noticed that only Frank Fenton seemed to have heard the sound, for he moved, then raised his head and let it fall back again, sleepily.

"We must get them at once out in the air, Scalp Taker."

"You shoulder the head imp," and he took up the form of Bostwick and placed it upon the back of the Pawnee, who cheerfully bent to receive the burden.

Then, throwing Frank Fenton's heavy form across his own shoulder, as though he had been a child, he stooped down and lifted the limber body of Corbett from the floor, holding it under his arm.

"Lead on, Scalp Taker, for we have bagged our game," ordered Buffalo Bill, and the still manacled Indian leading, they passed on out of the room, and through an arched corridor into the open air.

Placing the unconscious men upon the ground, Buffalo Bill hastened to the stables, secured his keys and soon freed the noble Pawnee.

Then he felt in the pockets of the men until he found the keys of the irons on Frank Fenton's ankles, and set him free.

That done he got some ammonia out of the army surgeon's medicine-case, which a mistake had so opportunely given him, and putting it in some water, told Scalp Taker to bathe the face of the young soldier, and constantly try to arouse him.

While the intelligent Indian was engaged in this duty, Buffalo Bill saddled up all the horses, his own and the kidnappers' pack-animal as well, to be ready for a start as soon as Fenton would be awakened so as to ride.

In the kitchen three Dagoes slumbered soundly, but a call at the gate in the wall suddenly startled Buffalo Bill and his Pawnee comrade.

He at once put the Indian on his guard, and going to the gate called out:

"Who is it?"

"The Senor Mora! Who are you?"

"Pardon, senor, but your man is busy, and I came to open the gate for you—I am here with the prisoner from the fort."

"Good! but, where is Bostwick?"

"In the Mission, senor."

"But you have the young soldier all right?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then we are in luck, for when we get the girl our fortune is made."

"And you are my prisoner, senor."

The man gave a yell, but the muzzle of Buffalo Bill's revolver covered him, and he was quickly dragged from his horse and manacled with the irons taken off of the Indian.

"I don't exactly know, senor, how guilty you are, but your own words condemned you as an accomplice in the conspiracy, whatever it is, against young Private, Frank Fenton."

"I have no warrant for your arrest save justice, and a determination to take you with your fellow culprits to Fort Ready, dead or alive, for go with me you shall, if I have to kill you."

The man execrated in his choicest Spanish and in English as well, for he was not, after all, a Mexican, but his fury and profanity did no good, being all lost upon Buffalo Bill. Searching in the stables, Cody found a fresh horse upon which he placed his new pris-

oner's saddle and bridle; then forcing him to mount, the scout bound his prisoner securely to the saddle-horn and left him thus for future consideration, for he still had much to do to carry out his purpose of rescue.

Upon investigation, to his great joy the scout found Private Frank Fenton reviving, for he had not taken near as much of the drugged coffee as had the others.

"Buffalo Bill!" he murmured in a dazed sort of way, recognizing the scout.

"Yes, Fenton, I am Buffalo Bill and here to rescue you from the clutches of these miscreants. So, arouse yourself from your stupor."

"I drugged the coffee you drank but your captors are now far more under its influence than you are, and so are the people of the Mission as well. Now listen to me, for you must rouse yourself."

"Do you hear what I tell you? Answer!"

"Yes, I hear," was responded, still dazedly.

"You must exert your influence to shake off the drug for our safety all depends upon your regaining your senses quickly."

"I am trying hard, Mr. Cody," said the soldier. "I'll do as you say."

"Now listen to me and mark well every word I say. I have just captured Senor Mora, and he goes with us, too, to the fort."

"I have with me, Scalp Taker, the Pawnee chief, and we must all be far from here when the day breaks."

"Do you understand all I am saying to you?"

"Yes, and I am trying hard to rally, but my brain is so confused. I will move about and rouse myself."

Buffalo Bill seized him by the arm and walked him rapidly up and down for a few minutes.

Under this heroic treatment after a short while Frank Fenton rallied greatly from his stupor, and was able to aid the scout in working upon the two soldier kidnappers, but it was very hard to arouse them as they had drank most freely of the coffee.

At last, however, the scout decided to tie them in their saddles as they were and the movement of the horses on the march would help to arouse them. This was accordingly done, the scout handling them with no gentle hand.

When all was ready the pack-horse was given to Scalp Taker to lead and the party left the old Mission San Juan, closing the gate behind them, and leading the three Dagoes still slumbering soundly, so soundly that Buffalo Bill remarked:

"I hope I have not killed them."

"No danger of hurting a Dago with anything to drink, Chief Cody," replied Frank Fenton who was now quite himself again while the two kidnappers were coming more and more out of their stupor as the party progressed on the trail, Buffalo Bill keeping the horses going at a lively pace to put as much distance between himself and old Mission by daylight as it was possible to do.

CHAPTER LXIII.

A DEAD MAN'S SECRET.

WITH Surgeon Powell and Buttons again safe in the fort, it was hoped that Buffalo Bill would keep up his record for luck and return before long, bringing Frank Fenton with him.

Yet it was well understood by all at the fort that he had gone upon the trail of two desperate men and would have much to contend against in his rescue of the young soldier.

Pearl was becoming more and more accustomed to her surroundings at the fort, and daily winning the hearts of all she came in contact with, while Colonel and Mrs. Markham congratulated themselves over and over again having found such a loving daughter in the captive girl.

One day Pearl took out an old morocco wallet that had belonged to her father, and in looking it over had found a closely written story of his life but which he had never shown to her.

Other papers were there too, and she decided to show them all to Mrs. Markham.

This she did, taking them in one rainy day when the colonel and his wife were alone together.

The colonel looked over the papers and then read aloud the story of the dead man.

He told of his youth, his marriage, his having received an inheritance and how happily he was living, when an erring brother came to him for help, and from that time a shadow fell upon his life.

For that brother he had done all that was in his power, until at last he had given nearly all that he possessed in the world to pay his debts.

Then a forgery was committed, and the crime was traced to him when he knew that his brother was the forger, but that brother did not come to his relief, so he was tried for the crime, but at last set free.

His eldest son was a cadet at West Point, and when the disgrace had fallen upon his father, he had resigned, though he stood at the head of his classes, and had gone, no one knew where.

Going to the West, Dr. Fairfax had begun life anew, practicing in a frontier settlement and was doing well, when, one day in riding through a canyon he had discovered gold.

Search soon found that he had indeed "struck it rich," and going home he told his wife of his fortunate discovery.

That very night the Sioux swept down upon the settlement. His wife and three of his children were slain; his home was burned, and he and his daughter Pearl were carried off into captivity.

The whole story of the life of the unfortunate man was told, and Colonel Markham read it with deepest interest.

But more; he made the discovery that his guilty brother, some years the doctor's junior, was named Bostwick Fairfax, and that he had as a companion a man by the name of Michael Moran who had been instrumental in fastening the crime of forgery upon the one who was not guilty.

This man had once loved the lady whom the doctor had married, and so it was revenge that prompted his act in trying to destroy him.

What the colonel also discovered was that the doctor's son, the West Point cadet, bore the name of Frank Fenton Fairfax!

At once the post commandant gave an exclamation of surprise and said:

"Pearl, I do believe that the young soldier, Frank Fenton, is your own brother."

"He was a splendidly-drilled soldier when here, and among his effects which I have looked over since his departure I have found proof enough to convince me that his name is Fairfax."

"But for these papers, this secret of a dead man, I never would have suspected it, but now I am firmly convinced that Frank Fenton Fairfax is your own brother."

"And now he is away, his fate unknown, and I have another sorrow to bear," said Pearl sadly.

"Yes, he is away, but upon his trail is the man of all others who will rescue him; and, mark my words, Buffalo Bill will bring him back safe and sound. He'll never fail upon such a trail!"

"Heaven grant it!" said Mrs. Markham, and she continued:

"Now I think of it, Mabrey, there is a striking resemblance between young Fenton and Pearl."

"Indeed there is a strong likeness between them, wife! Let me tell you, Pearl, that, among the papers left by your father, is a map of his mine, and directions how to find it; and here is his will, leaving to yourself and your brother, Frank Fenton, all that he may possess."

"He adds that he fears the secret of his 'gold find' is known to one Michael Moran, who was dogging his steps, and he is sure that he saw the face of Moran at the window when he finished telling your mother of his lucky discovery."

Just then, cheering was heard without and an orderly entered.

"Well, orderly, what is it?" asked the colonel.

"The chief of scouts has returned and Private Fenton is with him, while others are along, too, sir."

"Yes, colonel," said Major Melton, entering the room hastily, "Cody is here and Fenton is rescued, while the scout has also brought three prisoners with him, two of them being the soldier deserters, Bostwick

and Corbett," and as he made the announcement, the tall forms of Buffalo Bill and Frank Fenton appeared.

The welcome they received was a surprise to them, though they were not long in learning the reason.

CHAPTER LXIV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN young Frank Fenton heard the story which Colonel Markham had to tell him—that Pearl, the fair sharp-shooter of the fort, was his own sister, he was overwhelmed with delight, and admitted that he was indeed Frank Fenton Fairfax, and was as happy as was his sister at the reunion between them.

The colonel at once wrote to the War Department telling the whole story, and suggesting that his former requests that Private Fenton be given a lieutenantancy be complied with.

Then he sent the three prisoners East for trial, for it was shown that Mora was none other than Michael Moran—that he had heard the doctor's story of his mine, and had plotted to get possession, with the brother, Bostwick Fairfax, of Frank and Pearl, and thus secure all claim to the estate of Doctor Fairfax, for property East, once considered almost valueless, had proven to be of very great worth.

Even if they had to take the lives of the true heirs, Bostwick and Moran intended to get the fortune they plotted for, and for which purpose two of them, Corbett being their accomplice, had enlisted in the army to carry out.

But their plot failed, through Buffalo Bill, and they were sent to prison for their crimes.

Frank Fairfax did get his commission, and to-day is an honored officer of the army, while he also secured the fortune of his father for himself and his sister—she now being Mrs. Melton, for she fell in love with the gallant major as he had with her.

As to Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill they are to day heroes of real life, and all the world knows where to find them.

THE END.

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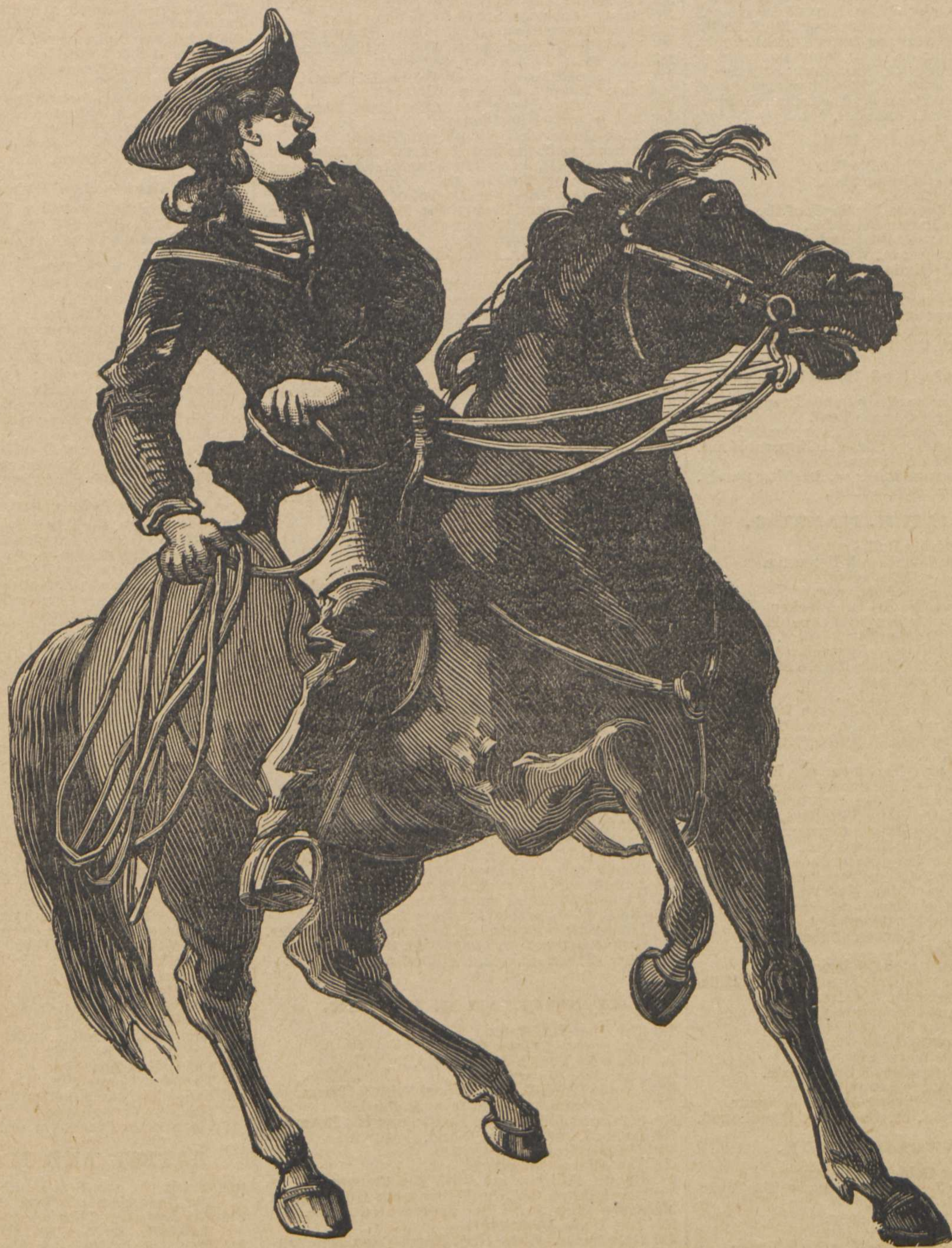
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